



# The Sad, Necessary Secrets of Les Wexner and David Schwartz

And How A Scruffy Kid From Seagate Weaponized Them

February 6, 2026 By [Mike Barr](#)

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TL;DR: The 2026 release of Jeffrey Epstein's private letters — including a chilling note invoking “gang stuff” with Les Wexner — is the latest chapter in a story that's, at its core really, about the weaponization of gay men's secrets. This post connects Epstein's long con on Wexner to the 1993 murder of closeted Cravath partner David Schwartz, and to what it actually felt like to be a gay man on Wall Street — or as an ambitious CEO — in the 1980s.

[IMAGE: Les Wexner's New Albany Ohio estate and 1980s Wall Street — the worlds Jeffrey Epstein moved between]

## The Letter That Changes Everything

Every now and then I am inexplicably summoned back to re-read James B. Stewart's meticulously researched, riveting, and heartbreaking New Yorker account of Cravath law partner David Schwartz's tragic end — at all of 55 — "[Death Of A Partner](#)."

“When you've been in our line of work as long as we have,” the detective explained, “and you find a male victim with thirty-two stab wounds in a seedy motel, it cries out homosexual murder.”

My most recent re-read was prompted by an email from a reporter trying to piece together Les Wexner's purported ties to Mossad. I couldn't really help her with that. But I was astonished to discover that someone, somewhere had stumbled upon my dog-days-of-summer obsession.

And here I am again today. Not one but three of my four daily reads lead with headlines about Mr. Wexner — and Mr. Epstein.

The key passage, from the NYT piece 'Gang Stuff' and 'Illicit Trysts': How Epstein Sought Leverage

With the Wealthy:

Mr. Epstein began his draft letter to Mr. Wexner by saying he was “truly sorry to hear that you have been the target of an extortion attempt” by Virginia Giuffre — one of Mr. Epstein’s most outspoken victims, who after years of hounding and harassment, including by PR firms and private investigators working for the Mountbattens, took her own life. He then reminded Mr. Wexner of what he called their mutual indebtedness and his past protection of Wexner’s interests.

Where things get truly chilling:

“You and I had ‘gang stuff’ for over 15 years. A great deal of it, that [your wife] was unaware of. I had no intention of divulging any confidence of ours, no matter what the accusations she made. I always told you I would never under any circumstances give it up, or put you in harm’s way, no matter who, what or when.”

The Epstein Formula: Flattery, Favors, Blackmail

The Financial Times, in a piece published the same day — "[Inside Jeffrey Epstein’s Social Ponzi Scheme](#)" — weaves the threads together:

“The picture that emerges is of a man with an extraordinary ability to work out exactly what some of the world’s richest and most powerful people wanted and needed, and provide it to them. When Epstein’s deployment of wealth, flattery or assistance failed, he would threaten and bully — turning the intimacy he cultivated in people into a fear of exposure that kept the machine running.”

This is, eerily, exactly the conclusion Vicki Ward reached in her [2003 Vanity Fair](#) profile — more than twenty years ago.

The slow accumulation of emails and documents feels less like a breaking story now and more like a reduction on the stove. Or the slow sauté of four large yellow onions being caramelized for a soupe à l’oignon gratinée. The flavors are beginning to speak.

“An extraordinary ability to figure out just what these rich and powerful men wanted and needed — procuring it for them, and then holding it over them.”

“Favors and flattery” could morph, when necessary, into “bullying and threats.” Which makes one wonder: having found himself in truly dire straits for the first time in his life — recall that his brief Palm Beach “imprisonment” allowed him to come and go freely — did Epstein’s late pivot toward the latter prove his final miscalculation? Mark, and for what it’s worth Ghislaine, surely seems to think so.

## What David Schwartz Has to Do With All of This

Wexner and Schwartz were both famously ambitious businessmen of roughly the same generation, born around 1937. Both were coming of age in a “Lavender Scare” world — witch-hunting, paranoid, punishing toward men like them.

Read the New Yorker piece for yourself. Or, if you’re old enough, simply think back to what it was

like to be gay in the business world in the 1980s and '90s. Yes, even in New York City. But Columbus, Ohio? Good god.

“The possibility that Schwartz deliberately cultivated qualities that ran counter to gay stereotypes doesn’t seem to have occurred to anyone.”

I worked first at Lehman Bros/American Express (don’t ask), straight off the boat from Columbus, and then at Wood, Struthers & Winthrop — owned proximally by Alliance Capital Management, with Donald, Lufkin & Jenrette layered on top — in the mid-’80s. There were closeted gay men galore (including among the three founders of DLJ, and it wasn’t Bill or Danny). But the unspoken code was simple: blend in. Everyone was on the DL. Beards were de rigueur. (Still owe you, Karen.) I lasted two years — departing shortly after throwing myself headlong into ACT UP.

David Schwartz, a Bronx native, seemed more emotionally resilient. He managed his double life — until it managed him.

At the firm, shock over Schwartz’s murder soon gave way to macabre humor. Partners even began embroidering the circumstances of his death, saying that his body had been found dressed as Little Bo Peep.

## The Midwestern Problem

Les Wexner, though, had grown up in the Midwest — where true emotions are barely permitted to this day. (I still audibly chuckle recalling how Prune’s Gabrielle Hamilton called them “mousy,” even if she was specifically talking about Michiganders.) Same-sex romantic attraction? Not a chance. What was a frustrated Jewish boy from Columbus to do?

Enter the smooth-talking, Rasputian fixer: one Jeffrey Edward Epstein.

It was obvious to the detectives that she was oblivious of the truth about her husband of thirty years, and they

# couldn't bring themselves to tell her.

If you missed Vicki Ward's [Vanity Fair](#) description of Wexner's overnight transformation after one of Epstein's extended visits to the New Albany compound — dyeing his hair for the first time, donning jeans so tight you could make out his junk — please take the time. It's priceless. He had hastily married in January 1993, almost as if selecting a bride from a catalogue, reportedly on Epstein's counsel.

[IMAGE: Jeffrey Epstein case documents — Les Wexner letters released 2026]

## The Falling

As the lists grow longer — Staley, Mountbatten, Mendelson, Summers, Attia, Karp, Chomsky?, Ruemmler, Wasserman — let us not forget that it was Wexner who fell first. He was forced to step down from his fashion empire six years ago this month.

To state the obvious: it's profoundly disappointing that no one has managed to get to the bottom of what happened on the ninth floor of the SHU that night in August 2019. The entire affair remains tragic and unresolved — as Melinda French Gates noted on camera earlier this week.

## A Mile From Where He Grew Up

Longtime Cravath associate William Dickey shared with journalist James B. Stewart his belief that what David Schwartz sought at that South Bronx cruising area was not danger.

“Not to be too Freudian about this,” Stewart quotes him as saying, “but David died about a mile from where he and I grew up. This was an area he knew well. I always felt that it was safe; my mother used to go to the A&P there. I don't think he was looking for danger. I think David was hiding, and he was hiding in a place he was familiar with. It's a sad thing that he had to hide, or that anyone has to.”

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### Sources:

- [‘Gang Stuff’ and ‘Illicit Trysts’: How Epstein Sought Leverage With the Wealthy](#) — NYT
- [Inside Jeffrey Epstein's Social Ponzi Scheme](#) — Financial Times
- [Death of a Partner](#) — The New Yorker
- [The Talented Mr. Epstein](#) — Vanity Fair

- [How Jeffrey Epstein Got His Hooks Into Les Wexner](#) — Vanity Fair
- [Jeffrey Epstein's Ghost Is Haunting the Grand Old Men of Capitalism](#) — The Economist

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<http://beta.docker.poz.com/blog/sad-necessary-secrets-lesley-wexner-david-schwartz>