

Blacklisting Woody Allen

by Bruce Bawer



It was the biggest scandal of the day, at least in New York. At its center was Woody Allen, arguably the city's favorite son, whose every new movie, good or bad, had loyal audiences lining up excitedly outside Manhattan cinemas. They didn't just love his films, which came out once a year, like clockwork; they loved him. Yes, he kept a low public profile, but they felt they knew him, because they identified him fully with the characters he played – intellectual, sentimental, neurotic nebbishes with endearingly self-effacing wit.

Overnight, it all changed forever. The year was 1992. For twelve years Woody had been involved in a relationship with Mia Farrow, who had starred in twelve of his movies. But suddenly his image was hit by a double whammy. First he announced that he and Mia were through and that he was in love with Soon-Yi Farrow Previn, the 21-year-old Korean orphan whom

Mia had adopted with her former husband Andre Previn. Next Mia accused him of having molested their seven-year-old daughter, Dylan.

I lived in New York then, so I experienced the hysterical coverage on local TV and in the tabloids. In fact, I lived on the Upper East Side, and the scandal was how I discovered Woody's address: one day I walked past an apartment building with hordes of paparazzi camped outside and realized it was his home.

The scandal seemed to drag on forever. Eventually, however, Woody was cleared by two exhaustive official investigations, one in New York and the other in Connecticut, where Mia had a country house.

He was never arrested or charged with a crime. His career resumed. He continued to release a movie every year.

But things weren't quite the same. The bloom was off the rose. His name had been tainted forever.

Decades passed. And then along came #metoo. In 2014, Dylan, then in her late 20s, resurrected the old accusations in an "open letter." The *New York Times* refused to run her text as an op-ed, but Mia's friend Nicholas Kristof, the *Times* columnist, posted it on his *Times* blog – a rather dodgy move which ensured that it enjoyed the imprimatur of a nytimes.com URL even though it really wasn't in the paper.

A frenetic new round of media attention ensued. Woody and Mia's son Ronan Farrow – newly famous for his Pulitzer-winning *New Yorker* exposés of Harvey Weinstein and other #metoo demons – went after Woody tooth and nail. He even tried to use his newfound clout to have *New York* magazine kill a friendly profile of Woody. In 2018, Woody and Mia's other son, Moses, weighed in, taking to his blog to insist on Allen's innocence and to say that the whole molestation story had been concocted by his mother as revenge after an ugly breakup.

One of the themes of the #metoo-era coverage of Woody Allen was that, because the 1992 scandal had taken place long before the #metoo movement happened, it was Mia, not Woody, whose public image had suffered afterwards. Nonsense. On the contrary, most of the media treated Woody, post-1992, as a child molester and Mia as a cross between Maria von Trapp and Mother Teresa. Mia's 1997 memoir, *What Falls Away*, won media raves and was a *New York Times* bestseller.

In short, Woody had been seriously damaged in 1992. But not until #metoo came along was he all but destroyed. In our brave new 21st-century world, cancellation requires no proof of any crime, and the ultimate punishment is total and permanent shunning.

So it was that, in 2019, solely on the basis of Dylan's disproven claims, Amazon Studios reneged on its plans to distribute Woody's movie *Rainy Day in New York*. Several members of its cast – including Oscar nominee Timothy Chalamet, who a couple of years earlier would have counted himself lucky beyond belief to star in a Woody Allen movie – publicly apologized for having been associated with Woody and donated their salaries to charity. Then, last year, when Grand Central Publishing, a division of Hachette, contracted to issue Woody's memoirs, Ronan and Dylan howled and scores of woke young Hachette employees rallied in protest – leading Hachette to drop the book.

Of course, Woody Allen isn't the only prominent figure to be targeted in recent years for career cancellation – usually for reasons that would've made little or no sense not long ago. One of the latest such assaults was Disney's firing of Gina Carano, an actress on the series *The Mandalorian*. Her offense: a tweet comparing the widespread demonization of Trump supporters to the gradual German ostracization of Jews prior to the Holocaust.

Curiously, even though Woody is world-renowned and Gina Carano

obscure, her peremptory dismissal by Disney generated a far more anguished media reaction than Woody's treatment by Amazon and Hachette. Indeed, several media commentators reacted to Carano's ouster by drawing parallels to the Hollywood Blacklist. Some might call this comparison a stretch; in fact the cancel culture that has targeted both Carano and Woody Allen, among countless others, puts the Hollywood Blacklist in the shade.

Quick flashback. The Hollywood Blacklist began in 1947 when ten screenwriters and directors – the “Hollywood Ten” – refused to answer the House Un-American Activities Committee's (HUAC) questions about Communists in their industry. Found guilty of contempt, they were fired by their studios. Though representing themselves as First Amendment champions, they were all Communist Party members, sworn to obey Stalin. In the following years, two hundred or so movie folk were denied film jobs; instead, many worked on Broadway and TV.

By 1960, the Blacklist had collapsed. Ever since, its victims have been fêted everywhere – from history classes to the news media – as free-speech heroes. Rarely is it acknowledged that being a Communist and being a free-speech hero are mutually exclusive. Almost invariably, too, the Hollywood Blacklist is described as the worst crime of its era – worse even, apparently, than Stalinism itself.

But the Hollywood Blacklist fades alongside today's Woke Blacklist, which has damaged, even destroyed, innumerable careers. None of its victims has been canceled for being a Communist – or a totalitarian of any stripe. They've been targeted for actions, opinions, offhand comments, or jokes that not so many years ago wouldn't have made anyone bat an eye.

It started, perhaps, with Islam. I wrote a whole book, *Surrender* (2009), about the censorship of Islam critics. I doubt it would be able to find a publisher in 2021, when

Rebecca Bynum's book *Allah is Dead: Why Islam is Not a Religion* was peremptorily removed from the Amazon website.

Increasingly, people have been branded racist for actions that no one would have considered problematic a decade ago. Twitter de-platformed Milo Yiannopolous for a quip about black actress Leslie Jones; NBC kicked Roseanne off the reboot of her eponymous series for an innocuous tweet about black Obama aide Valerie Jarrett.

Germaine Greer and Martina Navratilova have been shunned as transphobes for making statements of biological fact. Others have been banned for questioning official pandemic policies. Sen. Josh Hawley lost a book deal for raising questions about the 2020 election results. And the editor of *Forbes* exhorted colleagues not to hire former Trump officials.

Then there's #metoo, which came along in 2017. While some of the targeted men deserved the criticism they received, others were cases of wild overreach.

And then there's Woody.

An irony in Woody's case was that he'd starred in Walter Bernstein's *The Front* (1976) – a Hollywood Blacklist movie. Woody, who rarely appears in other people's films, had agreed to appear in *The Front* – as a schnook who gets paid to put his name on scripts written by Blacklisted screenwriters – precisely because he believed in its anti-Blacklist message.

One thing is clear. This cancellation process is accelerating, the nets spreading ever wider. More and more, our very freedom to speak our minds is drowning in ever broadening waves of destructiveness masquerading as sensitivity and justice. While the Hollywood Blacklist endured for just over a decade and affected only about 150 people (most of them very privileged traitors and supporters of totalitarianism), the Woke Blacklist has affected thousands (most of them classical liberals, more or less) and has long since outstripped its

1940s-50s predecessor in both scale and seriousness.

Allen v. Farrow

Fortunately for Gina Corano, she's been rescued by new-media mogul Ben Shapiro, who says he'll put her in a movie. But who's going to save Woody Allen?

For his #metoo pile-on didn't end with the cancellation of his memoir and of *Rainy Day in New York*. Between February 21 and March 14, HBO premiered a four-part, four-hour documentary, *Allen v. Farrow*, that dredges up the whole case all over again.

The problem starts with the title. It was Mia who sicced the law on Woody – so why is it called *Allen v. Farrow* instead of *Farrow v. Allen*? Obvious answer: the filmmakers, Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering, need to make Woody the heavy.

Who are these filmmakers? To quote the *Hollywood Reporter*, they've spent the last decade “on a righteous crusade, casting light on institutional failures to confront sexual abuse and giving survivors a platform. They've exposed rot in the military (*The Invisible War*), on college campuses ([*On the Record*](#)).”

I haven't seen any of Dick and Ziering's previous work. I do know that there's been sexual abuse in the military and the music business. But I'm also aware of the outrageously inflated statistics on campus rape. I know about the many campus rape defendants whose lives have been ruined without due process because we're expected to “believe the woman.” And I've heard the stories about male and female students who've gotten drunk together and fallen into bed, only to have the girl wake up sober and cry rape – only to be instantly celebrated as a heroic victim while her erstwhile sexual partner is treated as an evil predator.

Understandably, given Dick and Ziering's obvious agenda, Woody

refused to cooperate with them. So did his son Moses. The result is a repellent work that is patently out to make the case for the prosecution. Built mostly on the on-camera testimony of Dylan, Mia, and various relatives and intimates ("Mia," says one longtime friend, "was a real role model for a mother"), on Mia's apparently massive home videos, and on comments by writers for *Vanity Fair*, *Slate*, and other Woke publications, the documentary depicts Dylan's childhood – both in the rambling family apartment on the Upper West Side and in Mia's farmhouse in Connecticut – as well-nigh idyllic.

Idyllic, at least, until Woody entered the picture. At first he admitted to Mia that he had "zero interest in kids," which is treated as deplorable. Then, when Mia adopted Dylan, he flipped for her, which is treated as pathological. Even as Dick and Ziering demonize Woody for purportedly hovering over Dylan, they treat the fact that Mia was constantly in her kids' faces with a video camera (she even videotaped Dylan in the bathtub) as evidence that she's a wonderful mother.

The adult Dylan comes off in the documentary as a therapy junkie – her account of what she says happened to her is couched entirely in psychobabble – and as someone whose life has come to center on, and to find its meaning in, her accusations against Woody. One gets the impression that she views this documentary as her big chance to become a #metoo hero alongside her brother Ronan. Meanwhile, Ronan is his usual glib, smarmy self; talking about his family drama, he's so smooth and scripted that he might easily be doing one of his frequent cable-news gigs.

As for Mia, who looks these days like every aging flower child you've ever seen, the directors try to pass her off as near-saintly – and she presents herself as having been a naïve innocent when she met Woody. But even as they spend a considerable amount of time on her childhood bout with polio (patently to drum up sympathy), they, and she, entirely avoid her dark, kooky, and far from innocent backstory. This is a

significant omission. Watching her talk into the camera with a wide-eyed pseudo-earnestness, you'd think she grew up in a convent. And, again, given the way Dick and Ziering frame this whole thing, you'd think that Farrowworld, pre-Woody, was Sunnybrook Farm.

In fact Mia's life was a crazy mess long before Woody came along. When she was a girl, a relative tried to molest her. Her brother John went to prison in 2013 after facing over 20 charges of on child molestation. Her brother Patrick committed suicide. At 21, she became Frank Sinatra's third wife. After their divorce, she and the Beatles meditated in India with the guru Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Leaving India hurriedly, she accused the Maharishi of making a pass at her – a charge she later withdrew. Back in America, she stole her friend Dory Previn's husband, André, the orchestra conductor. As a result of this betrayal, Dory, a singer-songwriter, had a breakdown, was given shock treatments, and composed a little ditty about Mia called "Beware of Young Girls."

With André Previn, to whom she was married from 1970 to 1979, Mia had five children, two of them (including Soon-Yi) adopted. With Woody, with whom she got involved in 1980, she gave birth to one child, Ronan, and adopted two, Moses and Dylan. Post-Woody, she adopted five more. Some have viewed this history as proof of remarkable selflessness; others have dared to suggest that there might be something weird going on here. One bizarre detail is Mia's casual public statement, a few years back, that Ronan might or might not have been fathered by Sinatra (whom he strikingly resembles) rather than Woody.

But this back story is carefully edited in *Allen v. Farrow*. No child-molesting brother, no Maharishi, no Dory, no mention of Sinatra fathering Ronan. Everything is designed to make Mia look like Mother of the Year. The series could hardly be more calculatedly one-sided. From start to finish, you get the impression that Mia and her circle were putting this tale

together for decades before Dick and Ziering came along with their cameras.

In the first episode, Ronan promises that “no matter what you know” about the molestation charges against Woody, “it’s only the tip of the iceberg.” Indeed, the dramatic buildup in the early part of this series brings to mind one of those true-life stories on the ID Network in which a beloved husband and father turns out to be a murderous psycho with a dozen bodies buried in the backyard. “In the last twenty years,” Dylan laments, Woody was “able to run amok while I was growing up.” By “run amok” she means that, having been cleared of all charges, he kept making movies.

Dick and Ziering are shameless. They cite Woody’s involvement in the 1970s with a girl in her late teens (the basis for *Manhattan*), his on-screen romances with young women, and his relationship with Soon-Yi when she was in her early twenties as evidence that he’d be likely to rape a seven-year-old. They dig into his archives at Princeton and find unpublished stories and unproduced scripts about May-December affairs. You’d think he was the only man who, in middle age and afterwards, had his head turned by pretty co-eds – and that this had anything to do with a propensity for child abuse.

To shame Woody’s famous supporters, Dick and Ziering include clips of Dianne Wiest, Scarlett Johansson, Diane Keaton, and others paying tribute to him. They show the star-studded audience at the 2002 Oscars giving him a standing ovation. They suggest that recent comments in defense of Allen by the likes of Alec Baldwin and Javier Bardem were part of a coordinated campaign to “create a narrative.” (Well, Dick and Ziering would know all about that.) And they strive to underscore the message that the actresses who’ve jumped on the anti-Woody #metoo bandwagon – among them Mira Sorvino, Jessica Chastain, and Natalie Portman – are “courageous.”

They weave in material about Harvey Weinstein and Bill Cosby, as if Woody deserved to be mentioned in the same breath as those convicted child molesters. They use an article in *Paris Review* entitled “What Do We Do with the Art of Monstrous Men?” to raise the question of whether Woody’s whole *oeuvre* should be tossed. Of course, what’s monstrous here isn’t Woody Allen – it’s the unconscionable Kafkaesque torture that these filmmakers are putting him through.

As if this four-hour series weren’t quite enough, Dick and Ziering have put together a YouTube [podcast](#) in which they share outtakes, lavish one another with praise, and discuss other #metoo stories that they considered as documentary topics. In the podcast, Dick and Ziering sound like neighborhood gossips discussing something that’s none of their business; they seem obsessive; they come off, frankly, as rather dumb. And though they talk in solemn tones about how difficult it supposedly was to watch Mia’s video of Dylan’s “testimony,” they mostly give the impression of being gleeful about the job they’ve done on Woody Allen.

In an [interview](#) with Kirby Dick, the *Washington Post*’s Ann Hornaday, to her credit, got him to acknowledge his prejudices. For example, he felt that “the way that Mia was vilified” in the media back in 1992 was “very misogynistic.” He went into the *Allen v. Farrow* project, he said, knowing “that most survivors of sexual assault and most survivors of incest are telling the truth.” (A fatuous formulation: if they actually *are* survivors, then, yes, they *are* telling the truth. The question is whether they *are* survivors.) He said that he admires young people today because, having been “educated in the fact that 92 to 98 percent of sexual assault survivors are telling the truth,” they don’t respond to rape allegations by saying “There’s two sides to the story.”

In other words, he admires them because they assume the defendant’s guilt before the trial has started.

This is the mentality of the co-producer of *Allen v. Farrow*. No wonder that one of the talking heads in this thing is Gloria Steinem, who had nothing whatsoever to do with any of the events discussed in the film.

"Daddy in the Attic"

Alas, *Allen v. Farrow* has had the desired impact – on the critics, at least. Almost all the reviews I've looked at accept Dylan's story as fact. *Variety*'s review [stated](#) that the documentary lets Dylan be heard "about the worst thing that ever happened to her." The headline in the *Sun*, the British daily, [trumpeted](#): "Dylan Farrow recalls vile moment Woody Allen 'touched her private parts.'" The notice at the Collider website [referred](#) flatly to Dylan's "memories of what happened that day in the attic." Marlow Stern of Yahoo! News [praised](#) the film for presenting "a thoroughly convincing argument that Allen indeed molested his 7-year-old daughter." In the *New York Post*, Maureen Callahan [insisted](#): "The case built...is brutal, devastating and convincing." [Asserting](#) at IndieWire that the film presented "all the evidence anyone should need to form an opinion," Ben Travers made his opinion clear: "Allen's reputation remains exactly where it belongs – in the trash heap."

Is the documentary slanted? Sure. But who cares? In the *Chicago Tribune*, Michael Phillips [wrote](#): "Does *Allen v. Farrow* cherry-pick its bits and pieces of evidence? Yes. All documentaries do." While admitting that a lot of dicey stuff about Mia is "not dealt with here" – which you'd think would be reason enough to withhold judgment – Phillips asks: "If we don't believe Dylan Farrow, why is that?" Um, maybe precisely because this documentary *does* cherry-pick evidence and omit key facts? Unsurprisingly, the *Guardian*'s take was explicitly political: after the 1992 accusations, "Woody's legal team did everything in its power to cast Mia as a vindictive manipulator and Dylan as the impressionable child in her thrall, but the mainstream embrace of feminism clarifies that

those attacks were largely rooted in misogynistic notions of hysterical, untrustworthy women.” Apparently meaning that in 2021, there’s no such thing as “hysterical, untrustworthy women” who exploit their children to hurt their exes and who invent accusations out of sheer vindictiveness.

After much searching, I found a couple of notices that told the truth. The reviewer for *Aftenposten*, the Norwegian newspaper of record, recognized *Allen v. Farrow* as a “character assassination” of Woody Allen. *New York Post* [columnist](#) Andrea Peyser, who covered the legal proceedings way back when, illuminatingly pointed out in her piece on *Allen v. Farrow* the self-serving ways in which Mia has changed her story over the years. For this unjust indictment of Woody Allen, wrote Peyser, “the filmmakers, and Mia Farrow, should be ashamed.”

Yes. And they should also be ashamed for their thoroughgoing effort to discredit the most powerful testimony in the whole case – namely, that provided by Moses Farrow, who is now, of all things, a family therapist. On May 28, 2018, in a powerful blog [entry](#) entitled “A Son Speaks Out,” Moses remembered Woody as a positive influence on his childhood. “We played catch and chess, fished, and shot hoops. As the years went by, Satchel, Dylan and I were frequent visitors to his movie sets and his editing room. In the evenings, he’d come over to Mia’s apartment and spend time with us. I never once saw anything that indicated inappropriate behavior.” Yes, there was “fatal dysfunction within my childhood home.” But it “had nothing to do with Woody. It began long before he entered the picture and came straight from a deep and persistent darkness within the Farrow family.”

After outlining Mia’s strange personal history, Moses discussed Mia as mother. It was important to her, maintained Moses, “to project to the world a picture of a happy blended household of both biological and adopted children, but this was far from the truth.” Moses wrote that he “witnessed

siblings, some blind or physically disabled, dragged down a flight of stairs to be thrown into a bedroom or a closet, then having the door locked from the outside. She even shut my brother Thaddeus, paraplegic from polio, in an outdoor shed overnight as punishment for a minor transgression.”

Soon-Yi, who would end up married to Woody, was Mia’s “most frequent scapegoat” – and her favorite target of physical abuse. Then there was Tam, who was blind, and who “struggled with depression for much of her life, a situation exacerbated by my mother refusing to get her help, insisting that Tam was just ‘moody.’” Eventually, “after one final fight with Mia,” Tam “committed suicide by overdosing on pills.” Later, another one of the children, Thaddeus, “committed suicide by shooting himself in his car.” Lark, yet another of the siblings, “wound up on a path of self-destruction, struggled with addiction, and eventually died in poverty from AIDS-related causes in 2008 at age 35.” Most of this information is not even touched on in the documentary, and none of it is seriously addressed there.

Moses also described Mia’s sick cruelty toward him. *Mommie Dearest* is tame by comparison.

Finally, Moses detailed the events of the day on which Woody was said to have molested Dylan at Mia’s Connecticut house. Point by point, Moses’s testimony discredited Mia and Dylan’s. Exhibit A in *Allen v. Farrow* is a homemade video by Mia in which Dylan presents her account of the alleged molestation. Yet, as Moses recalled, the kids’ nanny, Monica, later testified that “it took Mia two or three days to make the recording” because she kept stopping the tape to egg the child on. When a therapist “questioned the legitimacy” of the tape, Mia fired her. Six months later Monica quit, “saying that Mia was pressuring her to take her side and support the accusation.”

Moses went on to make a crucial point:

In this time of #MeToo, when so many movie heavyweights have faced dozens of accusations, my father has been accused of wrongdoing only once, by an enraged ex-partner during contentious custody negotiations. During almost 60 years in the public eye, not one other person has come forward to accuse him of even behaving badly on a date, or acting inappropriately in any professional situation, let alone molesting a child. As a trained professional, I know that child molestation is a compulsive sickness and deviation that demands repetition.

As a Facebook contact commented the other day, "For 15 minutes, Woody Allen did something completely uncharacteristic of the rest of his life. Yeah, I buy that."

In this connection, it's worth noting that Woody Allen, like George Cukor in his day, is considered particularly gifted at directing women. As Steve Rose [wrote](#) in the *Guardian* in 2018, "Allen has given women better roles than pretty much any filmmaker of the modern era." His films have generated two Oscars for Best Actress, four for Best Supporting Actress, and six additional Oscar nominations for women. He's notoriously cast an army of beautiful young women to play his girlfriends – but, as Moses observed, not one of them has ever suggested that he ever behaved inappropriately in their company.

There's one more important detail. In his memoir, *Apropos of Nothing*, Woody writes that after Dylan's charges went public,

Dory [Previn], whom I'd never met or spoken a word to, contacted me...She alerted me also to a song she'd written, the lyric of which referred to some encounter that went on between a little girl and her father in the attic. The song is "Daddy in the Attic"...She told me Mia would sing it, and she was certain that's what gave Mia the idea to locate a fake molestation accusation she would make in the attic.

That's not mentioned in the documentary either. Nor is the

plain fact that charges of child abuse are a standard tactic for unscrupulous wives angling for a favorable divorce settlement – or for bitter women seeking to destroy the men who’ve jilted them. They know that while women’s physical affection toward children will always be interpreted benignly, men who exhibit such attachment can easily be destroyed by accusations that, once made, will never be eradicated from the minds of the public.

Yes, Woody Allen – like many great artists – is eccentric. But Mia is something far beyond that. The more one examines her story, the more she seems to be an exceedingly disturbed creature – a calculating Svengali to her beloved Ronan, and a venomous Javert to Woody’s Jean Valjean. That the cancel culture generally, and the #metoo movement in particular, came along at this point in their lives is the second big break of Mia’s life (the first being that her relationship with Woody landed her terrific roles in a dozen feature films) – and the great misfortune of Woody’s.

As for Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering, who’ve made their careers by pushing PC tropes, they’re a couple of hacks who, in *Allen v. Farrow*, have chosen to be parties to a cruel and unprincipled personal vendetta against a fellow filmmaker whose cinematic genius they can only dream of possessing. Their lack of principle is reflected in the news, which came out after the first episode of *Allen v. Farrow* was aired, that they’d never asked or paid for permission to use excerpts of Woody’s audiobook in their film – a major infraction of the rules governing this kind of enterprise.

One thought: if Dick and Ziering were so eager to see child molesters brought to justice, why didn’t they make a film about, say, the Muslim “grooming gangs” that have been proven to be responsible for the repeated rapes, over a period of decades, of untold thousands of girls in England – but that have been given precious little media attention relative to the scale of their perfidy? Or would such a documentary have

been too politically incorrect?

And Woody? Of all the victims of the cancel culture, it's he, I think, who's been shafted the most brutally – and for, as far as I can see, doing absolutely nothing wrong. He may well have been put through more than anyone who was ever targeted by the Hollywood Blacklist. Will he not be recognized as a martyr until after he's gone? And how many more undeserving victims will the Woke Blacklist claim before this barbaric Reign of Terror ends?

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