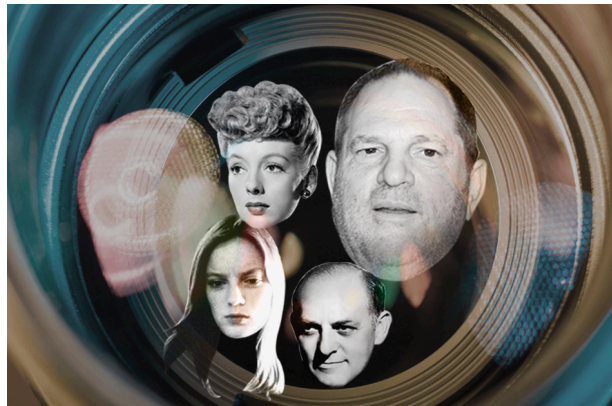




## Harvey Weinstein and the Alternative History of Hollywood

by AMY NICHOLSON **OCTOBER 16, 2017**



*History repeats itself: Evelyn Keyes, Harvey Weinstein, Harry Cohn, Sarah Polley (clockwise from top left) ILLUSTRATION BY ASHLEY SMESTAD VÉLEZ / VILLAGE VOICE. SOURCE PHOTOGRAPHS: ALAMY; PHOTOFEST; SHUTTERSTOCK*

In 1946, Evelyn Keyes's career was skyrocketing when Columbia Pictures boss Harry Cohn ordered the almond-eyed blonde, best remembered as Suellen O'Hara in *Gone With the Wind*, to his office, grabbed her between the legs, and whispered, "Save that for me."

Evelyn froze. She left. And that night, she got furious. Evelyn invited actor Sterling Hayden to go dancing at Mocambo. Let the paparazzi tell Cohn she wasn't his toy — defiance her onscreen sister Scarlett would have savored. The next morning, Cohn fired her. "You'll never be a bigger star than you are right now," he hissed. "I'll see to that."

He did. You won't find Evelyn's name on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Though if you follow the astral-studded sidewalk from the Ambassador Hotel where *Gone With the Wind* won eight Oscars, past the stars for Bill Cosby and Donald Trump, to the Dolby Theatre, the site of today's Academy Awards, you'll find a winding tile walkway of inspirational quotes called "The Road to Hollywood: How Some of Us Got Here." The installation is by a satirical, feminist artist named Erika Rothenberg. At the end is a concrete casting couch.

In 1977, Evelyn blasted Cohn in her autobiography. She felt safe. He'd been dead for almost two decades. That year, female DJs in Buffalo, New York, were warning each other to stay away from a young concert promoter named Harvey Weinstein. Soon after, Harvey and his brother, Bob, would launch Miramax, the film production partnership that would win a commanding 81 Academy Awards, and way, way, way too long after that, Harvey's empire would explode.

Harvey is finished. So why doesn't his collapse — and the celebration of the courageous women able to speak out while their abuser was alive — feel like victory?

Nicholson, Amy. "Harvey Weinstein and the Alternative History of Hollywood." *The Village Voice*, 16 October 2017.

Sarah Polley's fantastic piece "The Men You Meet Making Movies" opens with a telling detail. When Harvey ordered her to his office to ask his teenage *Guinevere* star if she'd agree to a "close relationship," she'd been posing for the movie poster — a cleavage-baring shot that had nothing to do with the actual film.

Sex sells is one of Hollywood's oldest rules. But it was chipped in stone by men like Cohn. We're so used to the small ways women are reduced to tits and ass that we stopped questioning "facts." Sometimes, an upstart group like The Headless Woman Project will point out the number of movie posters that sever women into dismembered body parts. It feels like pointing at how the shadows move and saying, "It sure looks like the Earth is revolving around the sun." Then we're reminded that no, everything orbits the world of men.

What if the industry would have listened to Evelyn seventy years ago? If, instead of caring about who she took dancing, the newspapers would have printed Cohn's assault on page one and run him and Louis B. Mayer and the rest of the rats out of town?

Imagine a different Hollywood where women are respected as human beings. Really picture it — picture the films, the posters, the scripts, the auditions, and the award shows where women have as good a chance of winning Best Director as their male counterparts. Equality is at once basic and world-upending. Honestly, it hurts my brain that I've never truly envisioned it before. My own myopia makes me feel ashamed. I understand why people hide their heads and swear the sun circles the globe.

Sarah, Ashley, Asia, Ambra, Rosanna, Emma, Romola, Heather, Gwyneth, Eva, Angie, Minka, Kate, Mira, and Rose. Imagine the careers they might have earned if they'd been born in an alternate Hollywood that respected them as artists. Imagine all the bimbo scripts unwritten, the bikinis lying dusty in costume departments, and the ability to walk into an office and pitch the kind of projects they'd want to make without it ever crossing their mind that some guy in a suit might demand a kiss.

Sarah — a dead ringer for Evelyn, by the way — could have worn *Guinevere*'s frumpy jeans and sweaters on her movie poster instead of that damned low-cut black dress. Ashley, so talented in movies like *Bug* that give her a real character to play, could have forged a résumé where she was always more than the hot girl who helps a detective. All of them could live inside bodies that belonged to them, instead of being display objects for our approval, or worse.

This story is growing, and I expect that list of names will, too. I'm scared about where this exposé could go, especially for the actresses who haven't felt safe speaking out. It's not hard to make a second list of Weinstein's women who might have been forced to submit. Gretchen Mol has already suffered decades of ridicule for being the Miramax It girl who never was. Five days after the accusations against Harvey broke, she was obliged to write: "No. I did not exchange sexual favors with Harvey Weinstein, or anyone, for advancement in my career."

More women are going to have to make similar denials. There will be other women who can't. When their names are revealed against their will, I hope people remember that Mol also called out the "salacious, slut-shaming, and misogynist" culture that pressured her to make a public statement.

Nicholson, Amy. "Harvey Weinstein and the Alternative History of Hollywood." *The Village Voice*, 16 October 2017.

To be doubly clear: Every woman Harvey treated like studio property is a victim, including — especially — those who tore their bodies in half and surrendered a piece of themselves to the man who claimed to own their entire life. And every woman in every department in Hollywood — and the absences of them in those departments from grips to would-be studio bosses — has been hurt by a sexist industry mind-set that began before everyone working in it today was even born.

"It's simply beyond time to have the conversation publicly," Ashley Judd said to the *New York Times* in that brave article that brought one bad man down. Evelyn Keyes would have been proud to read her words — and maybe more than a little astonished that a major actress could say the truth about a major studio boss, and not only would a paper print it, but people would believe her, and the boss would lose his job. Or maybe Evelyn would just be surprised it took this long.

Still, I don't yet dare to believe women might one day work in that fair and feminist Hollywood that I never even allowed myself to imagine. But one week after Ashley Judd did what Evelyn Keyes couldn't, the concrete casting couch on Hollywood Boulevard — that pointed, bleak joke about a mind-set literally carved in stone — was shrouded in a tarp and taken away.