

The filmmaker vanishes: Roman Polanski's name missing from Paramount's Blu-ray version of *Chinatown* (1974)

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Paramount Pictures, as part of its Paramount Presents series, released a 4K Blu-ray (also known as Ultra HD Blu-ray) version of Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* on June 20, marking 50 years since the film's debut in movie theaters.

Astonishingly, as a number of more sharp-eyed observers have pointed out, Polanski's name is missing from both the front and back of the Blu-ray case. Moreover, one commentator observed, after checking numerous Paramount Presents titles, "the director is mentioned in every single summary and/or special features section." Not so on the new *Chinatown*. Polanski has been "disappeared," even from the fine print.

Needless to say, the original posters for *Chinatown*, in various languages, English, French, Polish, Russian, German, Italian and more (accessible here), featured Polanski's name prominently.

This new version of McCarthyite blacklisting has come about because—thanks to #MeToo-induced hysteria—official Hollywood has done whatever it can in recent years to erase Polanski's films and his very artistic existence.

An Officer and a Spy (J'accuse, 2019), the Polish-French director's compelling work about the Dreyfus affair in France (1894-1906), has never been released theatrically or on home video in the US, the UK, Australia or New Zealand. His latest film, *The Palace* (2023), was likewise unable to find distribution in the US or UK.

Polanski pleaded guilty in 1977 to unlawful sexual acts with a minor. When a corrupt judge threatened to renege on the plea bargain, and planned instead to sentence Polanski to years in prison, the filmmaker fled

the US.

As a 2020 open letter signed by 100 female French lawyers observed, the victim in the case, Samantha Geimer (then Gailey), "has appealed countless times for an end to the exploitation of her story." In an interview with the French-language *Slate* in 2020, opposing the campaign against Polanski, Geimer insisted that a victim "has the right to leave the past behind her, and an aggressor also has the right to rehabilitate and redeem himself, above all when he has admitted his mistakes and apologized."

The reactionary moralists attached to the #MeToo campaign have no interest in the facts of the Polanski-Geimer case, much less Geimer's oft-repeated view of the matter.

The identity politics crusade has taken hold of significant layers of the affluent middle class, firmly situated in the orbit of the Democratic Party. In fact, "Genocide Joe" Biden, now with the blood of tens of thousands of Palestinian women and children fresh on his hands, made a name for himself as an advocate of "women's rights." That empty demagoguery cost him nothing and earned him support within this privileged social layer.

Polanski, one of the most significant film directors of the past half-century, with *Knife in the Water*, *Repulsion*, *Cul-de-sac*, *Rosemary's Baby*, *Macbeth*, *The Pianist* and *Oliver Twist*, in addition to *Chinatown* and *An Officer and a Spy*, to his enduring credit, has been sacrificed on the altar of this right-wing, anti-democratic trend.

Among the more remarkable films of the 1970s, featuring Jack Nicholson, Faye Dunaway and John Huston, with a screenplay by Robert

Towne, *Chinatown*, a “story of a Depression-era conspiracy,” as the WSWS recently noted, “contains an indictment of the corruption, rapacity and violence of the contemporary social order in America and elsewhere.”

Set in Los Angeles in the 1930s, the film’s plot is based loosely on the California water wars of the 1910s and ’20s. During that period, as the WSWS explained, “the city’s officeholders diverted water from the Owens Valley into the metropolitan area. The water was used to irrigate the San Fernando Valley, large tracts of which had quietly been bought by a secret network.” Wealthy investors “profited handsomely at the expense of farmers in the Owens Valley.”

Nicholson memorably plays private detective Jake Gittes. As Gittes delves deeper into the scandal, involving the city’s rich and powerful, he moves “inexorably toward a final showdown the implications of which he only dimly understands.”

In an assessment of Polanski posted in 2009, we wrote that the filmmaker, an exile from “communism” (in Poland), “but an honest artist, with his eyes open, made a meticulously constructed, devastating and deeply felt indictment of American society. One wonders if the political establishment, especially in Los Angeles, ever truly forgave him.” The answer should be clear enough by now.

The expunging of Polanski’s name comes on top of the attempt by Amazon Prime to censor publicity for Stanley Kubrick’s *Full Metal Jacket* (1987). Amazon only reversed itself when actor Matthew Modine protested the removal of “Born to Kill” from a US combat helmet shown in the original poster, but deleted in the current Amazon advertising.

Paramount, of course, which distributed the film in 1974, would like to have its cake and eat it too. The studio wants to earn income from Polanski’s artistic efforts on *Chinatown*, but without provoking the ire of the #MeToo zealots by using his name. Hence, the absurdity of the current Blu-ray. If they could, presumably, studio officials would also excise Polanski’s brief but striking performance from the film.

During the McCarthyite period, the names of various left-wing writers could not appear in the credits of dozens of Hollywood films. In the 1980s, the Writers Guild of America began correcting writing credits from the Hollywood blacklist era. The union posted on its

website a lengthy list of Corrected Blacklist Credits. All of this was accompanied by a great deal of film industry-wide breast-beating and, implicitly at least, pledges that such shameful activities—eagerly supported by the Democratic Party, the Guilds and the entertainment media at the time—could and would never be repeated.

But the full-scale blacklisting of Polanski and Woody Allen is taking place in front of our eyes, and there has been no outcry in Hollywood, not from the Writers or Directors Guild, or anyone else.



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