

HBO's docuseries *Allen v. Farrow*: A shameful, vindictive, McCarthyite attack on filmmaker Woody Allen

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Directed by Amy Ziering and Kirby Dick

The four-part HBO documentary *Allen v. Farrow*, two of whose episodes have aired, concerns the claims of sexual abuse aimed against veteran comic and filmmaker Woody Allen, 85. His adopted daughter Dylan Farrow—encouraged by her mother, Mia Farrow, Allen's estranged partner—alleges that Allen molested her when she was seven. The allegations were the subject of two official investigations that cleared Allen of any wrongdoing.

Allen v. Farrow purports to be an investigation into the 1992 incident. However, like many of the US media's crude propaganda efforts at the moment, the docuseries is loaded with unsubstantiated assertions and hearsay, insinuations, irrelevant comments—but lacks any persuasive evidence.

There are no new facts in the first two episodes of *Allen v. Farrow* and virtually no impartial, objective or genuine probing. Even the soundtrack, appropriately sinister when it needs to be, is meant to manipulate the viewer and direct him or her toward the desired conclusion. The interviews, individual shots and clips are designed to confirm a preconceived agenda and already arrived at notions.

Directors Amy Ziering and Kirby Dick have become specialists in fashioning #MeToo claims into “documentary” films. Their 2015 effort, *The Hunting Ground*, which focused on sexual assault on college campuses, came under sharp criticism for its “misleading” and “inaccurate” character. A group of Harvard law professors described *The Hunting Ground* as a “purported” documentary that provides “a seriously false picture both of the general sexual assault phenomenon at universities and of a male Harvard law student who is accused of assault.”

The appearance of *Allen v. Farrow* on HBO is not accidental or insignificant. In 2018, Ronan Farrow, the son of Mia Farrow and Woody Allen, signed a three-year deal with the pay television network to “develop and front a series of investigative documentary specials,” according to an HBO press release. “His stories,” the statement added, “will continue to document the abuse of power by individuals and institutions and will proceed in tandem with ongoing reporting for the *New Yorker*.” In October 2017, in the *New Yorker*, Farrow helped launch the #MeToo witch hunt with his supposed exposé of film producer Harvey Weinstein.

Farrow, a former Hillary Clinton adviser and US State Department official in Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Middle East and North Africa, i.e., a liar by vocation, has loudly and publicly lined up with his mother in the effort to destroy Allen. He took the lead in 2020 in attempting to block the publication of Allen's memoir, *Apropos of Nothing*.

None of these facts has deterred the American media from almost universally showering praise on *Allen v. Farrow*. These headlines are typical: “If you're still watching Woody Allen's films, this scathing four-

part documentary series asks you to ponder why” (Salon); “The new documentary will sound the death knell for Woody Allen's career” (*Independent*); and “HBO's devastating ‘Allen v. Farrow’ is a nail in the coffin of Woody Allen's legacy” (*LA Times*).

In response, Alec Baldwin, one of the few Hollywood actors to show some backbone, tweeted: “Who needs courtrooms or rule of law when we have trial by media?”

Allen and his wife Soon-Yi released a statement denouncing the HBO documentary. It read: “These documentarians had no interest in the truth. Instead, they spent years surreptitiously collaborating with the Farrowes and their enablers to put together a hatchet job riddled with falsehoods. Woody and Soon-Yi were approached less than two months ago and given only a matter of days ‘to respond.’ Of course, they declined to do so.”

“As has been known for decades,” the statement continued, “these allegations are categorically false. Multiple agencies investigated them at the time and found that, whatever Dylan Farrow may have been led to believe, absolutely no abuse had ever taken place... While this shoddy hit piece may gain attention, it does not change the facts.”

Allen v. Farrow begins innocuously enough, with a history of the Allen-Mia Farrow relationship. Soon, however, the story darkens, as various talking heads sound off, without any substantiation, about how Dylan became the subject of her father's “intense affection” and even inappropriate behavior. The filmmakers build up in the first episode to the January 1992 smash-up of Allen and Farrow as a couple, after the latter found sexually provocative photos of her college-age daughter, Soon-Yi Previn, in Allen's apartment.

One doesn't have to approve of Allen's conduct to avoid turning the issue into the basis for a campaign of ostracism and persecution. No one suggested that Allen be assigned to write a volume devoted to ethics. “He is not Spinoza, he is a comic,” as the WWSWS has pointed out.

Ziering and Dick, and their willing interviewees, attempt to demonize Allen. Largely monopolizing the series, Farrow offers her version of things, while smiling seraphically, a benevolent earth mother devoted to her children and humanity at large.

An array of vengeful females eagerly chime in against Allen, including some, like singer Carly Simon, who have no apparent reason for being there. One member of this venomous coven intimates that Allen is a predator who “groomed” his alleged victim—a charged phrase plucked from a police procedural. Without permission, the filmmakers use selected parts of Allen's audio version of *Apropos of Nothing*.

Featured in the second episode is the sanctimonious, neo-Puritan Richard Morgan, who wrote an article for the *Washington Post* in 2018 headlined, “I read decades of Woody Allen's private notes. He's obsessed with teenage girls.” The *Post*'s sub-headline claimed, “His [Allen's] 56-box archive is filled with misogynist and lecherous

musings.”

In his appearance in *Allen v. Farrow*, Morgan repeats a version of what he wrote at the time: that “running through all of the boxes [of Allen’s material] is an insistent, vivid obsession with young women and girls.” This was not earthshaking news then nor is it today.

Dylan Farrow repeats her claims about Allen’s molestation in the second episode.

The neurotic crowd of interviewees leaves an unfavorable impression. While in certain cases it is difficult to determine whether the participants are lying or have merely deluded themselves, the testimony reeks of unreality and falsity.

In his book, *Apropos of Nothing*, Allen mounts a convincing defense against the molestation charges. He refers to the two major investigations carried out, one by “the Child Sexual Abuse Clinic at the Yale–New Haven Hospital, whom the police used to look into such matters, and one by New York State Child Welfare. Unlike so many women who complained of sexual misconduct only to have their complaints swept under the rug and not taken seriously, [Mia Farrow’s] accusation was taken most seriously.”

The Yale–New Haven report found that “Dylan was not sexually abused by Mr. Allen,” and, further, “we believe that Dylan’s statements on videotape and her statements to us during our evaluation do not refer to actual events that occurred to her on August 4, 1992.” The clinic concluded that either Dylan made up her statements or the child “was coached or influenced by her mother, Ms. Farrow... We believe that it is more likely that a combination of these two formulations best explain Dylan’s allegations of sexual abuse.”

Allen also points out that “the molestation accusation was dismissed by New York State Child Welfare investigators who examined the case scrupulously for fourteen months, and came to the following conclusion. From the letter received on October 7, 1993, I quote: ‘No credible evidence was found that the child named in this report has been abused or maltreated.’”

Moses Farrow, the adopted son of Allen and Mia Farrow and the brother of Dylan and Ronan, refused to be interviewed for the documentary. He is a therapist in Connecticut specializing in adoption trauma therapy, especially among transracial adoptees.

In his May 2018 essay, “A Son Speaks Out,” Moses Farrow alleged that his mother regularly beat him and his siblings. “It pains me to recall instances in which I 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 eventually marry Allen, was Mia Farrow’s “most frequent scapegoat,” wrote Moses. “My sister had an independent streak and, of all of us, was the least intimidated by Mia. When pushed, she would call our mother out on her behavior and ugly arguments would ensue. When Soon-Yi was young, Mia once threw a large porcelain centerpiece at her head. Luckily it missed, but the shattered pieces hit her legs. Years later, Mia beat her with a telephone receiver.”

Three of Farrow’s adoptive children, Tam, Lark and Thaddeus, died tragically, two of them, according to Moses Farrow, by suicide, and one “in poverty.” (Thus far, Ziering and Dick have ignored their fates. Nor have they mentioned that Mia’s brother, John Charles Villers-Farrow, was sentenced in 2013 to 25 years for child molestation in Maryland.)

In his 2018 essay, Moses Farrow also attacked the sexual molestation narrative. He explained that the alleged abuse occurred in August 1992, at a time when there were five children and three adults in the house in Connecticut, “all of whom had been told for months what a monster Woody was. None of us would have allowed Dylan to step away with Woody, even if he tried.”

Moses took apart the adult Dylan’s apparently photographic memory of the sexual assault, including her claim that she was playing with a toy train set in the attic during the episode. He commented, “It’s a precise and compelling narrative, but there’s a major problem: there was no electric train set in that attic. There was, in fact, no way for kids to play up there, even if we had wanted to. It was an unfinished crawl space, under a steeply-angled gabled roof, with exposed nails and floorboards, billows of fiberglass insulation, filled with mousetraps and droppings and stinking of mothballs, and crammed with trunks full of hand-me-down clothes and my mother’s old wardrobes.” The documentary simply leaves out the discredited electric train set story.

In *Allen v. Farrow*, Ziering and Dick include a letter Moses wrote to his father as a child expressing disappointment after the Soon-Yi affair became public, but his 2018 revelations clearly do not jibe with their agenda.

The genesis of *Allen v. Farrow* is as shabby as the final result itself. In 2016, according to the *Hollywood Reporter*, co-director Ziering was a member of the Sundance jury and was seated next to future Harvey Weinstein accuser, the unstable Rose McGowan, at a festival-sponsored dinner. “‘I don’t know who she is. She doesn’t know who I am,’ Ziering recalls. ‘I said, ‘I did *The Hunting Ground*.’” She goes, “‘Oh my God, can we talk?’” Rose tells me her whole story about Harvey.’

“A few months later, Ziering met with another soon-to-be accuser, actress Ashley Judd. They began pitching the Weinstein project around town, and ‘everyone said no,’ Ziering notes... Then #MeToo hit. ‘My cellphone explodes, and everybody is like, “Remember that thing you pitched? Would you guys still want to do something?”’”

The lead investigative producer at Ziering and Dick’s production company, explains the *Hollywood Reporter*, then “suggested they pursue Dylan Farrow.” The wife of multi-millionaire Hollywood executive Peter Guber had once “promised the pair seed money if they decided to pursue a project on incest. Dylan Farrow’s story could bridge the Hollywood #MeToo backdrop with Guber’s call for an incest deep dive.”

No one involved would be embarrassed by the cynical and opportunist character of *Allen v. Farrow*’s development. In any event, the rest is well-financed and well-publicized history.

The Ziering-Dick documentary argues that pressure exerted on the authorities discouraged them in 1992 from proceeding with a legal case against Allen and that, in general, his immense “power” in the film industry has protected him from well-deserved exposure and punishment. This is the world turned upside down. Allen here is the victim, the target of relentless persecution. He has now been essentially blacklisted in the American film industry, unable to find a distributor in the US for his movies.

Mia Farrow has had her virtually unopposed way in and with the American media for years. She has had influential allies at the *New York Times*, including columnists such as Nicholas Kristof and Maureen Dowd, the *Washington Post*, the *New Yorker*, HBO and elsewhere. Innumerable Hollywood actors have obediently fallen into line, “regretting” having worked with Allen and promising never to do so again.

Allen v. Farrow is a shameful, vindictive, McCarthyite attack. Mia Farrow and her apologists are unmoored, self-obsessed, middle-class individuals. Disoriented, panicked and frightened by social and political developments, unable to find any progressive or rational social outlet for their thoughts and emotions, they have discovered the meaning of their lives in the vendetta against Allen.

The deaths of half a million in a pandemic, the threat of authoritarianism, endless war, malignant social inequality, none of this means much to such people—but an alleged and unproven episode of molestation that took place 30 years ago, this is something they can sink their teeth into.

The media and the ruling elite warm their hands over such scandals,

which serve to distract as many people as possible from the burning social questions and generally pollute the cultural atmosphere. The sex scandal is inevitably a means of coarsening social life and turning official politics further to the right.

Allen v. Farrow has a distinctly sick quality and, as we have repeatedly pointed out, so does the entire sexual misconduct campaign. The level of unreason, hysteria, banality is remarkable. The fact that Allen has never been charged, let alone convicted, of any misconduct does not give the #MeToo crusaders who made and participated in *Allen v. Farrow* pause for thought, devoid as they are of any democratic sentiments and even the most elementary humanity.



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