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Kinsey as He Really Was—What You Won't See in the Movie

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Reviewers greeted the movie with excitement. A. O. Scott, writing in The New York Times, declared that “Bill Condon’s smart, stirring life of the renowned mid-century sex researcher Alfred C. Kinsey, has a lot to say on the subject of sex, which it treats with sobriety, sensitivity and a welcome measure of humor.” Mr. Scott neglects to mention that the movie treats its “subject” without an adequate measure of truth.

Rather than expressing outrage that a scandalous individual with a well-documented pattern of sexual perversity is being celebrated, Mr. Scott sees the movie as a mixture of entertainment and enlightenment. “The director addresses sexuality with candor and wit, but it is the act of research as much as its object that imparts to Kinsey its flush of passion and its rush of romance,” he celebrated. He went on to gush: “I can’t think of another movie that has dealt with sex so knowledgeably and, at the same time, made the pursuit of knowledge seem so sexy. There are some explicit images and provocative scenes, but it is your intellect that is most likely to be aroused.”

The reviewers for Newsweek acknowledged that “Kinsey’s methods were far from perfect,” but they nevertheless celebrated both the movie and its central character. Indeed, they commend Kinsey “who shattered any vestiges of Victorian modesty, leading curious Americans from bedroom peephole to upfront view between the sheets.” In a sidebar, David Ansen declared that the movie “is a celebration of diversity; its about the solace knowledge can bring.” Writing in The Wall Street Journal, reviewer Joe Morgenstern declared that Kinsey doesn’t try to sell or exploit sex. According to Morgenstern, the movie “does remarkably well as a cultural history of a vanished time” and “is intelligent to a fault.”

Alfred C. Kinsey is one of the most controversial figures in American history—and for good reason. An entomologist by training, Kinsey turned from his intense fascination with the gall wasp to the study of human sexuality. He burst upon the American scene with his pioneering 1948 volume, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. Eventually, Indiana University was to establish the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction, and the name “Kinsey” was to be associated with progressivist sex education, opposition to traditional sexual morality, and liberation from fixed concepts of “normal” when dealing with human sexuality. The Kinsey Institute has what many consider to be the world’s largest collection of pornography, sexually explicit art, and various sexual objects. What the institute does not advertise is its links to data gathered by child molesters and sex criminals.

By any measure, Alfred Kinsey was a tormented and conflicted figure. Raised by a puritanical father and a withdrawn mother, Kinsey’s adolescence was marked by sexual turmoil and experimentation. As is now well documented, the young Kinsey was involved in sadomasochistic sexual behaviors and was driven by homosexual desire.

In a groundbreaking biography published in 1997, James H. Jones blew the cover on the Kinsey myth. According to

this popular and pervasive mythology, Alfred Kinsey was a scientist who brought his rigorous scientific skills and objective scientific interests to the study of human sexuality. The real Alfred Kinsey was a man whose own sexual practices cannot be safely described to the general public and whose interest in sex was anything but objective or scientific.

From the onset, Jones recognized Kinsey's central role in the sexual revolution. "More than any other American of the twentieth century," Jones acknowledges, "he was the architect of a new sensibility about a part of life that everyone experiences and no one escapes."

Nevertheless, the real Kinsey was hidden from the public. Jones describes his project in these words: "As I burrowed into more than a dozen archives, read tens of thousands of letters, and interviewed scores of people who knew Kinsey in various capacities, I discovered that his public image distorted more than it revealed."

As Jones reports, "The man I came to know bore no resemblance to the canonical Kinsey. Anything but disinterested, he approached his work with missionary fervor. Kinsey loathed Victorian morality as only a person who had been badly injured by sexual repression could despise it. He was determined to use science to strip human sexuality of its guilt and repression. He wanted to undermine traditional morality, to soften the rules of restraint, and to help people develop positive attitudes toward their sexual needs and desires. Kinsey was a crypto-reformer who spent his every waking hour attempting to change the sexual mores and sex offender laws of the United States."

There was more to it than that, of course, and Jones marshals an incredible mountain of documentation to prove this point. In the first place, the adolescent Alfred Kinsey was deeply involved in masochistic self-abuse. In Jones' words, "Somewhere along the line, he veered off the path of normal development and was pulled down a trail that led to tremendous emotional conflict and self-negating physical abuse."

Driven by wild sexual fantasies and determined to overthrow what he saw as a repressive sexual morality, Kinsey eventually dropped his study of insects and turned his study to human sexuality. Tragically, Jones must acknowledge that the world of science "would have been better served had Kinsey not allowed his lust for data to obscure his judgment."

What exactly was Kinsey up to? He and his close band of young male associates went about collecting an enormous body of data on human sexuality, first looking at male and later at female populations. In his research on the sexual behavior of males, Kinsey brought his ideological and personal passions to the forefront of his supposedly scientific work. He arbitrarily decided that human beings are to be located in a continuum of development between heterosexual and homosexual poles. He developed a six-step chart and argued that men and boys are arrayed all along this line between absolute heterosexuality and absolute homosexuality. He would later argue that almost forty percent of all males would have some homosexual experience. Of course, hidden from public view was the fact that Kinsey was doing his very best to rationalize his own homosexuality—or bisexuality as later commentators would explain—and was not at all the objective scientist collecting neutral data from a responsible population base.

Among the many problems inherent in Kinsey's research is the fact that he relied upon reports and sexual studies taken from prison populations, including sex criminals. Therefore, Kinsey's notion of "normal" was drawn from a decidedly abnormal population sample.

The most troubling aspect of Kinsey's research is the data he collected on the sexual response of children—especially young boys. Chapter Five of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* considered the sexual experience of boys, including infants. Kinsey wanted to prove that children are sexual beings who should be understood to have and to deserve sexual experiences. In this chapter, Kinsey is largely dependent upon the data contributed by "Mr. X," a man who had molested hundreds of boys ranging from infants to adolescents. As Jones explains: "Viewed from any angle, his relationship with Mr. X was a cautionary tale. Whatever the putative value as science of Mr. X's experience, the fact remains that he was a predator pedophile." Over decades, this man abused hundreds of young boys, tortured infants, and, as Jones explains, "performed a variety of other sexual acts on preadolescent boys and girls alike."

Kinsey did not condemn this man, but instead eagerly solicited his "data." As a matter of fact, Kinsey went so far as to attempt to pay Mr. X for further research and once wrote to him, "I wish I knew how to give credit to you in the forthcoming volume for your material. It seems a shame not even to name you."

Those words betray a moral monster of the most horrible depravity and assured criminality. Alfred Kinsey celebrated the fact that this man had sexually tortured children and, as Kinsey's own published work documents, had sexually abused two-month-old infants.

All this was explicit in the data published in Kinsey's 1948 volume, but he was nonetheless celebrated as a sexual pioneer and as a profit of sexual enlightenment.

Unbeknownst to the general public, Kinsey was also involved in sex acts with his staff and in the filming of hundreds of persons involved in sexual activity—including footage taken of his own masochistic sex acts. He and his colleagues paid adolescent boys to perform sex acts on film and turned the Kinsey house into a studio for pornographic documentation. In one incredibly weird twist on the story, Mrs. Kinsey, or "Mac" as she was known, is remembered to have brought refreshments to the participants at the conclusion of their sex acts and video sessions. She was herself filmed in various sexual situations and Kinsey encouraged his associates to engage in sex acts with his wife.

What does the cultural elite now make of all this? The New York Times review acknowledges that the movie takes a great risk "in attempting to deal frankly with its hero's own sex life without succumbing to prurience or easy moralism." In reality, however, the movie doesn't deal frankly with Kinsey's perversions at all. The reviewer concedes, "Sometimes his scientific zeal shaded into obsession, and his methods went from the empirical to the experimental in ways that remain ethically troubling."

Ethically troubling? Is that all The New York Times can muster in response to Kinsey's own self-documented and published reports of child molestation?

In *Sex the Measure of All Things: A Life of Alfred C. Kinsey*, Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy laments the fact that Kinsey is not given the respect of his fellow scientists that he believed he deserved. Nevertheless, even Gathorne-Hardy acknowledges, "The recent digging up of Kinsey's private life, incidentally, is not going to help him" in this respect.

Gathorne-Hardy wrote his book largely in response to the damage to Kinsey's reputation inflicted by Jones' biography. Amazingly, Gathorne-Hardy claims: "Wherever we know something of his sexuality it is at once apparent that, while it hardly ever, if ever, impaired his integrity as a scientist, it had a decisive effect on his work. And where it does once or twice seem to impair that integrity, the effect is either not very significant-or else it is obvious. There is a transparency."

This is moral nonsense. Of course, this author attempts to make lemonade out of Kinsey's lemons in more than one way. At one point, Gathorne-Hardy goes so far as to claim that Kinsey's bisexuality was a great asset for his scientific work. "Kinsey was bisexual," Gathorne-Hardy notes, "an almost ideal position, one might think, for someone who was studying sexual behavior in both sexes." Who might think this?

We have become a society that celebrates men like Alfred C. Kinsey and produces movies that present such a man as an agent of enlightenment rather than as a tortured soul fighting his internal demons while soliciting data on the sexual molestation of young children—and filming any number of persons involved in any number of perverted sex acts.

In a letter he once wrote to his associate Clarence A. Tripp, Kinsey conceded, "The whole army of religion is our central enemy." Kinsey knew what he was up against, and his ambition was not merely to collect data, but to overthrow the entire structure of Christian morality in the realm of human sexuality.

Instead of being rightly classified as a criminal along with the likes of Dr. Joseph Mengele and other Nazi scientists, Alfred C. Kinsey is now lionized and celebrated in a movie starring Liam Neeson as the supposedly heroic figure. What does this say about Liam Neeson? What does this say about us?

