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## The Bad and the Beautiful: Hollywood in the Fifties

*Sam Kashner, Jennifer Macnair*

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### the **BAD** and the **BEAUTIFUL**

**HOLLYWOOD IN THE FIFTIES**

**SAM KASHNER and JENNIFER MacNAIR**

"Dig it, kats and kittens, chix and charlies:  
this is the definitive take on sex, sleaze-mongering, moral  
vacuity and paranoia in the American 1950s. Kashner and MacNair have  
created a *City of Nets* for hipsters and low-lives.  
This book soars." — James Ellroy

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**Sam Kashner, Jennifer Macnair : The Bad and the Beautiful: Hollywood in the Fifties** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Bad and the Beautiful: Hollywood in the Fifties:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Otto Friedrich by way of Kenneth Anger By Jay Dickson This terrifically readable cultural history of Hollywood in the Fifties was inspired by James Ellroy's wish to the authors that there were a book about the era as fine as Otto Friedrich's CITY OF NETS; the authors admit they could not quite match the comprehensiveness of Friedrich's achievement, nor are they quite as erudite or analytically sophisticated.

But, in their best chapters (on the culture of Hollywood expatriates, and in fine narratives of the making of *REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE* and *NIGHT OF THE HUNTER*), they come close to matching the engaging tone of and gossipy frisson engendered by Friedrich's famous book. The initial chapters on the scandals covered by and created by "Confidential" magazine read more like Kenneth Anger's *HOLLYWOOD BABYLON* than Friedrich, but as the study continues it just gets better and better. I didn't want it to end. 13 of 15 people found the following review helpful. high on anecdote, low on context  
By Nysocboy  
What did the lives of the Hollywood glitterati mean to American culture during the 1950's? We don't find out. Lots of anecdotes, most quite familiar, but little sense of historical context. The text is well written and goes down well, but when the book is over we are left with no greater understanding of the 1950's or the movie industry, wondering, what was the point. 1 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Barbara Payton Omission Reflects Rather Superficial 50s Coverage  
By observer22  
The authors state they did not intend this book to be a comprehensive review of 1950s Hollywood. Yet they seem to have missed some notable figures such as the almost unbelievable fate of early 50s actress Barbara Payton who in less than five years went from starring in major films to being an alcoholic prostitute. Good coverage of Confidential magazine and also the three gossip queens. Should have been better.

A vivid portrait of power, fame, and sex in 1950s Hollywood, from the rise of tabloid journalism to the making of legendary film icons. With "fresh emphasis on little-known stories [and] an impressive number of eyewitnesses" (Chicago Tribune), Sam Kashner and Jennifer MacNair present "a revealing,...ever fascinating glimpse into the shadowy reality and hidden mores of Hollywood in what was popularly considered a decade of innocence" (Suzanne Finstad). "[S]urprisingly vivid accounts" (People) of such public icons as Lana Turner, Rock Hudson, Kim Novak, and Mae West explore the private scandals exploited by tabloids such as Confidential. Highlighting Hollywood's curious religious revival with *The Robe*, the film industry's exploitation of the potboiler *Peyton Place*, and the life of anarchic director Nick Ray of the enduring classic *Rebel without a Cause*, the authors "[give] a compelling sense" (Kirkus Reviews) of the unique obsessions of the era and the city's attempts to reinvent the magic and mystery of its past glories. Guided by the authors' historical savvy and intimate storytelling, we discover a city at a crossroads, attempting to reinvent the magic and mystery of its past glories. Tragic, irreverent, and always entertaining, *The Bad and the Beautiful* reveals the underground history of this turbulent decade in American film. 35 b/w photographs.

From Publishers Weekly  
The 1950s are often dismissed as a peaceful interval between the war-ravaged '40s and the socially stormy '60s. Not so, according to journalists Kashner and MacNair, who offer a juicy, gossip-gorged exposé of '50s Hollywood. They begin, appropriately, with the story of Confidential magazine, a publication that outed gays and revealed interracial romances, prison records and extramarital affairs. The chapter "The Lavender Closet" concentrates on homosexual scandals involving tennis great Bill Tilden, actress Elizabeth Scott and writer/actor/director Nol Coward. Kashner and MacNair comprehensively cover anticommunist hysteria, along with powerful studies of blacklisted screenwriter Alvah Bessie and actor Lee J. Cobb. The book's most striking subject is Nicholas Ray, director of *Rebel Without a Cause*. Inevitably, the authors emphasize the film's sexual backstory (Ray and *Rebel* cast member Dennis Hopper were both having affairs with Natalie Wood), but Ray's genius, his battles against the studio system and contribution to the fiery James Dean legend enhance the director's stature as a neglected immortal. Kashner and MacNair deal amusingly with Hollywood's religious period, ranging from Billy Graham's low-budget *Mr. Texas* to Twentieth Century Fox's Cinemascope circus, *The Robe*. Well-known anecdotes about Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton and Lana Turner are outshone by gritty profiles of legendary screenwriter Ernest Lehman (*The Sweet Smell of Success*), self-destructive novelist Grace Metalious (*Peyton Place*), anorexic actress Sandra Dee (*Imitation of Life*), suicidal playwright William Inge (*Picnic*) and cutthroat columnists Louella Parsons, Hedda Hopper and Sheila Graham. These accounts, often dipped in acid, will keep readers flipping pages and highlight Kashner and MacNair's intention to write "a prismatic rather than an academic view of 1950s Hollywood." Photos. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.  
From Library Journal  
While Fifties Hollywood meant Disney films, the Legion of Decency, and pious epics like *The Ten Commandments*, it was also the era of Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard*, the blacklist, the scandal sheet Confidential, and the "lavender closet" as the authors note, homosexuality was considered "a kind of sexual equivalent of Communism." This popular, subjective history is a series of vignettes capturing a Hollywood in transition, pressured by television, the studio system's decline, and the postwar emerging permissiveness. Topics include the influence of the short-lived but much-feared Confidential; the clout of aging gossip queens Louella Parsons, Hedda Hopper, and Sheila Graham; and the uproar over an interracial romance between Sammy Davis and Kim Novak. Journalist Kashner and MacNair, a writer for *The Jim Lehrer Newshour*, write most perceptively on the era's classics (*Sweet Smell of Success*), and the best chapter describes how director Nicholas Ray forged his timeless portrait of teen-age angst in *Rebel Without a Cause*. The book is a brisk read but not the last word on Fifties Hollywood (though other, better books on the subject are out of print). The chapter on the misdeeds of the children of Hollywood stars could apply to any era, and chapters on Oscar Levant, Mae West, and Grace Metalious seem of dubious relevance. Despite its flaws, this book is recommended for public library collections. Stephen Rees, Levittown

Regional Lib., PA Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. From Booklist Kashner and MacNair plumb the culture of the movie capital during the decade that saw the death throes of the studio system. They attack the subject from the fittingly venal perspective of Confidential magazine, the premier celebrity scandal sheet of the time, which gives events the colors of a James Ellroy novel or a Quentin Tarantino film thriller. No liberties need be taken, either, what with a cast including the likes of Lizabeth Scott, Sammy Davis Jr., and Rock Hudson. Not to mention tennis pro Big Bill Tilden, coach to the stars and chronic molester of boys, on whose healthful longevity Confidential opined that he "was always fast asleep by 10:30" because the juvenile objects of his desires "had to go to school the next day and consequently had to be in bed early." Packed with understated tales of drunken, drugged, and lewd high jinks, the volume sheds the worst possible light on the entertainment industry, which, of course, is all to the good, for inquiring minds want to know this stuff. Mike Tribby Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved