

Welcome to...



FILM NOIR





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BEWARE THESE "GENTLEMEN" OF THE PRESS!



"Come baby
Be it for me baby
go to bed!"



BURT LANCASTER

The world-famed columnist who commands sixty million readers...he can
make a star, break a senator or "fix" a politician - in ten words or less!

and this is the bit who had ideas about taking over!

TONY CURTIS



There's no woman for me
... I'm the man that
... I'm the man
... I'm the man!



HEIDI HILL & LANCASTER

**SWEET
SMELL OF SUCCESS**

THE MOTION PICTURE THAT WILL NEVER BE FORGOTTEN - OR FORGOTTEN!

Produced by OSCAR WISNICOFF. Screenplay by ROYD NEALE. Directed by OTTO PREMINGER. With HEIDI HILL, BURT LANCASTER, TONY CURTIS, and JOE BELMONTE. MCA-UNITED ARTISTS.

**“The Man to
Blame for Our
Culture of
Shame”** by Jon
Meacham,
N.Y. Times
Book Review,
April 30, 2017



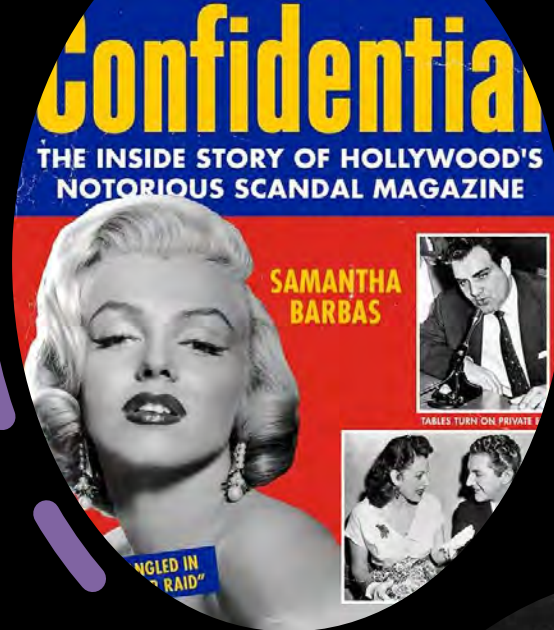
From: “Winchell: Gossip, Power and the Culture of Celebrity” by Neal Gabler

That June (1957) ... United Artists released a film that was to destroy his (Winchell) reputation for posterity. Its germ was a story by a young writer and former press agent...named Ernest Lehman.

On the screen, in ruthless black and white, *Sweet Smell* had become an inventory of Broadway odiousness.

From "The Bad and the Beautiful:
Hollywood in the Fifties" by S.
Kasner and J. MacNair

- *Sweet Smell of Success* illustrated the corrosive effect of gossip and the burgeoning tabloid culture, fed by the success of *Confidential* magazine and the enduring power of columnists like Walter Winchell and Hedda Hopper.
- This stylish black and white film refuses to go away. Its sly influence has cropped up in the work of directors as diverse as Martin Scorsese, Barry Levinson, the Coen brothers and Paul Thomas Anderson.



The Look of the Movie



Sweet Smell of Success did for New York what ***Sunset Boulevard*** did for Hollywood. Among the film's many pleasures are **James Wong Howe's*** low-angled, chiaroscuro (an effect of contrasted light and shadow created by light falling unevenly or from a particular direction on something), making ***Sweet Smell of Success*** the first and possibly the best film to capture the look and feel of New York City.

- **Howe*** shot his subjects from low angles so they always seemed to be “knifing up, as if poised for the kill.” The city is awash in brilliant shadows – everything gleams. *Sweet Smell of Success* is a corrosive valentine to New York.

- *Howe was a master of the use of shadow, one of history's ten most influential cinematographers in a survey of the members of the International Cinematographers Guild.





- ...what cineasts really love about this film is its biting dialogue, written by Ernest Lehman and that most miserable of urban geniuses, Clifford Odets.

The Dialogue

- The *Sturm und Drang* (“Storm and Stress”) of bringing Ernest Lehman's tale to the screen had a nearly lethal effect on a number of its players..It helped to derail the career of its brilliant director, Alexander “Sandy” Mackendrick.

The Central Characters

- Ernest Lehman – author of the novellette and the screenwriter
-
- Clifford Odets – famous playwright and screenwriter
-
- Walter Winchell – gossip columnist
-
- Hecht, Hill and Lancaster – production company
-
- Alexander “Sandy” MacKendrick – director:
-

A major **problem** was the **power struggle between Mackendrick (director) and Lancaster**. They both wanted to be in control.



• Elmer Bernstein -

composer:

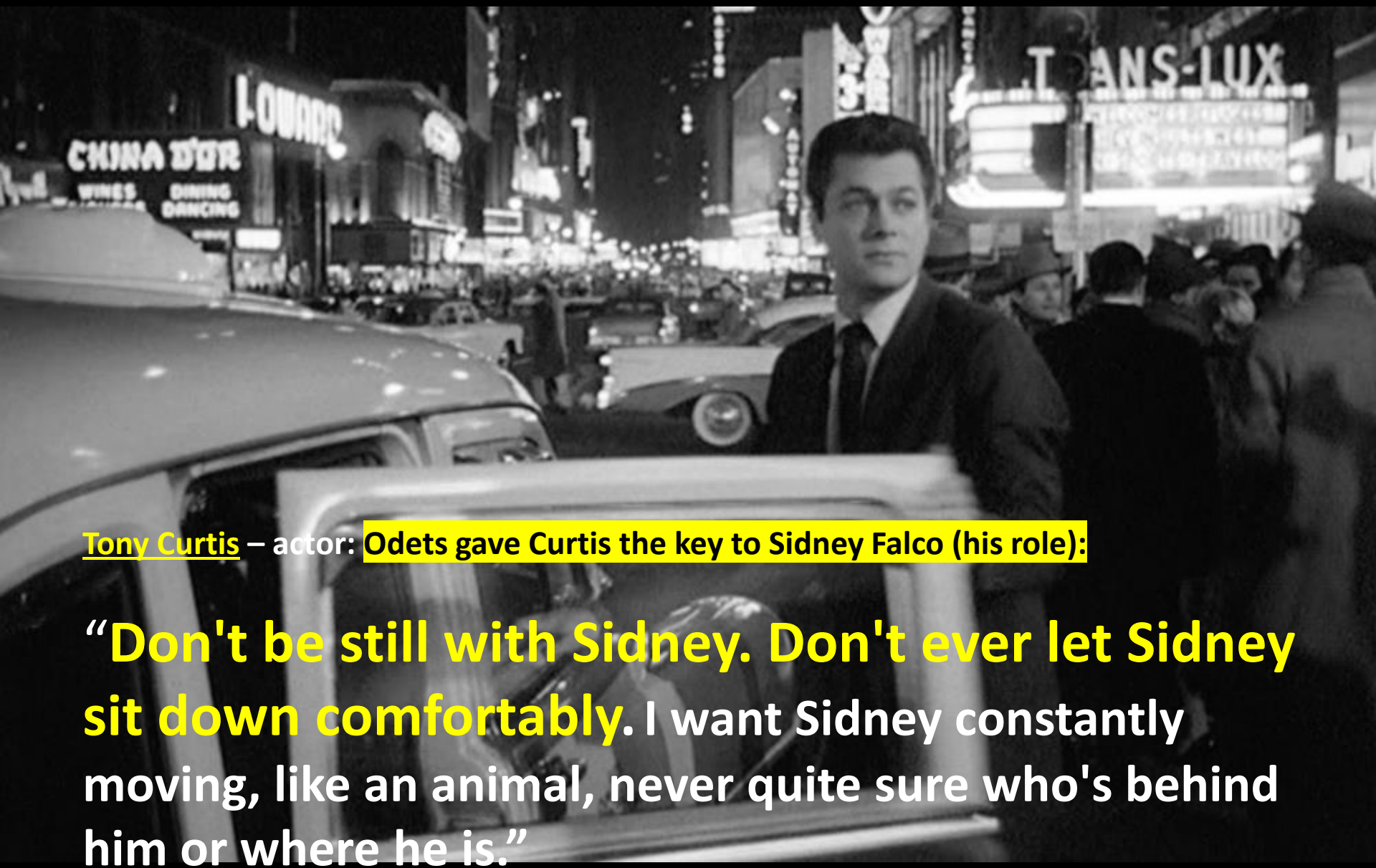
- **“Burt was really scary. He was a dangerous guy, he had a short fuse, he was very physical. You thought you might get punched out...It was a miracle that (Sandy) finished that film. In fact, I think that film is what finished Sandy.”** Lancaster would later admit with a grin that **Mackendrick considered him 'pure evil.'”**



*1,001 Movies
You Must See
Before You Die*

- **The monumental Lancaster, lit like the Frankenstein monster, is amazingly hateful**





Tony Curtis – actor: **Odets gave Curtis the key to Sidney Falco (his role):**

“Don't be still with Sidney. Don't ever let Sidney sit down comfortably. I want Sidney constantly moving, like an animal, never quite sure who's behind him or where he is.”

**In contrast to Falco, J.J.
Hunsecker (Lancaster) hardly
seems to move...**

**Ambition moves, power stays
put.**

**“Curtis does his best screen
work as the quivering
minion, eating himself up
from the inside as he tries to
do J.J. a favor”**

(1001 Movies You Must See Before You Die)

• **Curtis** took Odet's suggestions to heart. And **gave what many consider his breakthrough performance.** Both MacKendrick and Lehman thought that Tony Curtis was **“miraculous”** as Sidney Falco. For Curtis ***Sweet Smell of Success*** opened doors; other brilliant roles would follow.



- Susan Harrison – actress (18 years old, first role)

- Curtis: “working with those guys was tough. We all came in with barrels loaded, we all came in to fight. Susan had no experience at all, so we drove her down into nowhere. She seems lost in the film.”



3 Questions to consider while watching the movie!

- **1.** Pay attention to the **nightclub scenes**. Anything strike you about them? What do you think of them?
- **2.** How does the director make **Lancaster less physically imposing** in the movie?
- **3.** Notice the **early morning, daylight scene**. When does it occur? Why?

- BEFORE
- THE
- MOVIE



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AFTER THE MOVIE



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- Premiered June 27, 1957, Loew's State Theater, NYC:
- Q: WAS THE FILM A **SUCCESS OR FAILURE?**
-
- A. **CRITICAL SUCCESS** – made *Time* mag and *NY Herald's* ten best films of the year
-

• **BUT**

POPULAR FAILURE, i.e.,

The public hated it!

WHY?

Martin Scorsese: “It was such a **tough film.**”

Other reasons:

“...too cynical for the times --- in 1957 America was in no mood to see a film about its dark side’

And the public wasn't ready to see two popular stars, Curtis and Lancaster, cast as villains.”

BUT

- the film is still credited with **destroying Winchell's reputation.**
- Winchell's biographer, Neal Gabler, wrote Lehman's novelle and Mackendrick's movie had **“helped sully Winchell's name forever.”**
- **“*Sweet Smell* would emerge as a classic --- one of the quintessential New York films** and one that, rightly or not, definitely **established the image of Winchell as a magalomaniac”** (“Winchell” by Neal Gabler)

- **And next week...**

