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ThursdayStyles



A scene from the movie "Kids," which Harvey Weinstein calls "the most controversial film I've ever been associated with."

'Kids,' Then and Now

The cultural impact of Larry Clark's film can still be felt, two decades after its release.

By BEN DETRICK

For cultural alarmists of the 1990s Clinton era, the film "Kids" represented a culmination of fears.

Released 20 years ago this month, the film centers on a cabal of broken New York teenagers who spend 24 hours boozing, rolling blunts, fighting and indulging in unsafe, emotionally vacant sex. It is "Lord of the Flies" with skateboards, nitrous oxide and hip-hop.

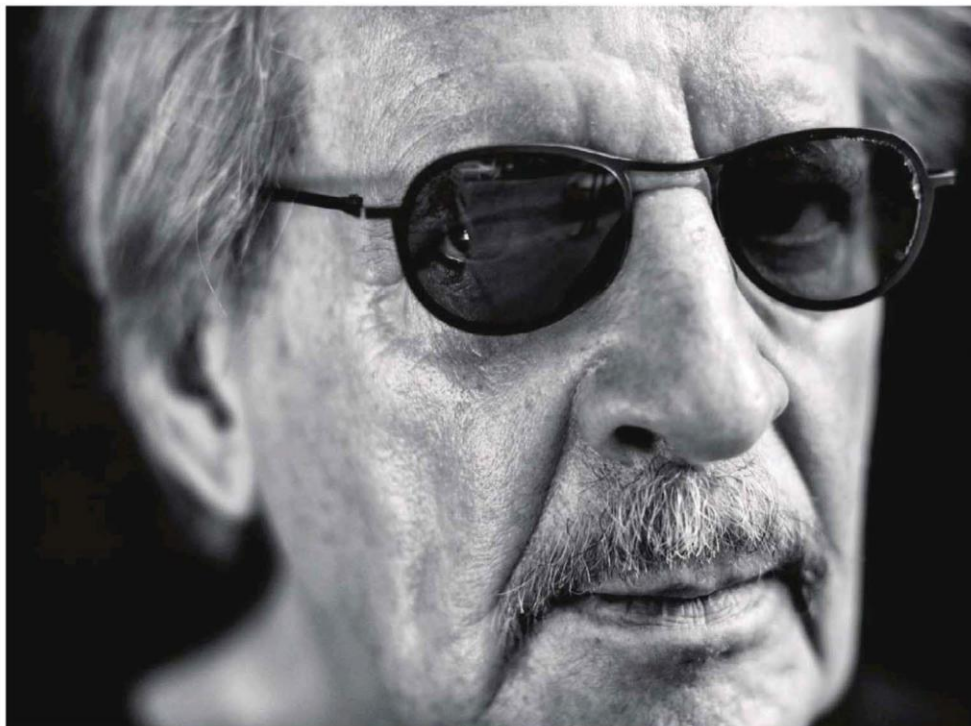
Unflinching in its quasi-vérité realism, "Kids" opens with Telly, a pale and rawboned Lothario, deflowering an adolescent girl and ends with a drug-fueled rape at a house party. There is no thunderous moral reckoning, only observational detachment.

"It makes almost any other portrait of American adolescence look like the picture of Dorian Gray," Janet Maslin wrote of the unrated film in her review in The New York Times.

Harvey Weinstein, who purchased and distributed the movie, wrote in an email, "'Kids' was the most controversial film I've ever been associated with." His company, he said, was threatened by state courts that asserted that the film violated certain non-federal laws. "The vitriolic reactions only reinforced its importance and further affirmed how special the film was," Mr. Weinstein said.

Two decades later, "Kids" has become an art house classic and a cultural touchstone, celebrated by a screening last month at the

'The kids who saw the film said: "Gee, man, this gets what's happening. This is real." Whereas a lot of parents said, "It's a dirty old man's fantasy."



Brooklyn Academy of Music, which reunited the cast for the first time, and a commemorative skate-wear collection at Supreme.

"Somehow it's just become this timeless thing," said Chloë Sevigny, who played Jennie, the protagonist who learns she is H.I.V. positive. "It endures because kids love coming-of-age movies. There's something captivating about rebels, and it's shocking, appalling, titillating."

The film's power to horrify has been diminished not by time, but by the recognizability of its cast, not one of whom was a professional actor in 1995.

Rosario Dawson is now a Hollywood star; Ms. Sevigny is accomplished in film and fashion; Leo Fitzpatrick bounces between acting and art; Larry Clark, the director, has continued to make films focused on youth counterculture. And Harmony Korine, who was 19 when he wrote the screenplay in his grandmother's basement in Queens, has directed films including "Spring Breakers" in 2012.

But on a darker note, two of the actors in "Kids," Justin Pierce and Harold Hunter, died young.

"It's weird, the paths a lot of us have taken," said Mr. Fitzpatrick, who played Telly. "As a skater, you throw yourself down a lot of stairs, all day, every day, to roll away from a trick once. The older you get, you find other things to fill that weird masochistic voice. My friends don't go see therapists."



Clockwise from far left, the "Kids" director, Larry Clark, and three of its stars today (Rosario Dawson, Chloë Sevigny and Leo Fitzpatrick). Above left, Harold Hunter, another cast member, died in 2006.

'Kids,' Then and Now



Rosario Dawson

ROLE

Ruby, the ringleader of a group of teenage girls who regale one another with graphic accounts of their sexual exploits.

BEFORE 'KIDS'

"I was a straight-A student," said Ms. Dawson, who was 15 when Mr. Clark and Mr. Korine spotted her sitting on a stoop outside the Avenue A tenement where her family lived. "I was a tutor. I was a virgin. I was boyfriend-less. I didn't have sex until I was 20."

MEMORABLE SCENE

At the health clinic where she gets an H.I.V. test, Ruby recounts her carnal escapades, sometimes unsure of how many times she engaged in certain acts. "I was playing a character that was really sexually promiscuous, but I was making a movie that was about the perils of childhood, when you think you're going to live forever," Ms. Dawson said. "The other kids movies, like 'Ferris Bueller,' they were hokey and silly and fun, but played by adults. This was kids being kids." Still, some relatives were caught off guard by the film's graphic sex. "My grandmother was like, 'You could have warned us before we told all of our church friends.'"

AFTER 'KIDS'

Ms. Dawson, now 36, has emerged as the movie's most visible alumna. Her long list of film credits includes "He Got Game," "Sin City," "Rent" and last year's "Top Five," in which she starred opposite Chris Rock. She is also known for her political activism and philanthropy, and she recently started a sustainable fashion line, Studio One Eighty Nine, with pieces like kimonos that are hand-dyed in Ghana and Mali.



Leo Fitzpatrick

ROLE

Telly, the self-proclaimed "virgin surgeon," who spends much of the film trying to seduce pubescent girls. "Man, I was so bad with girls before the movie," Mr. Fitzpatrick said. "And it sure didn't help my cause any. People attached me to the character a lot more than I attached myself to it."

BEFORE 'KIDS'

As a teenager in West Orange, N.J., Mr. Fitzpatrick would ride the bus to New York and skateboard in Washington Square Park. There, he befriended Mr. Clark, whose proclamations about making a film were initially dismissed as idle chatter. The decision to cast Mr. Fitzpatrick (16 at the time) was initially met with resistance from the film's producers. "They wanted Ricky Schroder or something, whoever the hot kid was," Mr. Fitzpatrick said. "They wanted somebody who was probably more charismatic, better looking, that you could understand what he was saying. But Larry knew that wasn't authentic."

MEMORABLE SCENE

For Mr. Fitzpatrick, it took place at the Carmine Street swimming pool, where the teenagers had sneaked in and splashed beneath a 1987 mural by Keith Haring. The setting was also featured in "Raging Bull," by Martin Scorsese. "The idea of being part of the fabric of New York is really nice," Mr. Fitzpatrick said.

AFTER 'KIDS'

Mr. Fitzpatrick exiled himself to London after the film's release, but he returned to New York and acting several years later. After appearing in Mr. Clark's "Bully" in 2001, he spent three

seasons on "The Wire" on HBO and had a role on "Sons of Anarchy."

More recently, Mr. Fitzpatrick appeared in an episode of "Broad City," and he has a part in "Pee-wee's Big Holiday," scheduled for release in 2016. Mr. Fitzpatrick is also a D.J. and art gallerist. Along with the artists Nate Lowman and Hanna Liden, he founded a pop-up gallery, Home Alone, that produces art shows in TriBeCa storefronts and other tiny spaces. He recently joined the Marlborough Chelsea gallery as a creative consultant.



Justin Pierce

ROLE

Casper, a reckless goon who spends his day huffing nitrous oxide, swilling beer and starting fights in the park. He is an antihero who exudes chaotic charm. "He's really riveting," Ms. Dawson said. "I had such a crush on Justin when we did the movie. He was such a mess."

BEFORE 'KIDS'

Mr. Pierce grew up in the Marble Hill section of northern Manhattan. In his teens, he dropped out of school and moved into a basement apartment on 176th Street known as "the dungeon" that was teeming with fellow skaters. His self-destructive streak was not fabricated for the screen; the role of Casper was written specifically with him in mind.

"His style, his swagger, his whole thing was kind of unprecedented," said Mr. Korine, who met Mr. Pierce skating in Washington Square Park. "He was supermagnetic, and there was something really beautiful about him. At the same time, he was completely uncontrollable. He went for it all of the time, and that's part of what got him into trouble."

MEMORABLE SCENE

As the climactic house party winds down, Casper lies in a bathtub with a 40-ounce bottle of Olde English 800 and drunkenly sings the theme to "Casper the Friendly Ghost," with improvised lyrics about "the dopest ghost in town" as an ode to himself. Moments later, he commits a sexual assault.

AFTER 'KIDS'

Mr. Pierce moved to Los Angeles to pursue acting. His credits included a role in the 2000 comedy "Next Friday," with Ice Cube and Mike Epps. But in 2000, he

hanged himself at the Bellagio hotel in Las Vegas. "He didn't really mean to do it, I don't think," Mr. Clark said. "But nobody was with him."

The funeral was held at St. Patrick's Old Cathedral in Little Italy, followed by a gathering near Supreme, the streetwear label founded by Mr. Pierce's friends. "Justin was great looking, he was charismatic, he was the one everyone wanted to be in the movie," Mr. Fitzpatrick said. "But maybe Justin wasn't that comfortable in his own skin."



Harold Hunter

ROLE

Harold, one of the skaters perched like gargoyles in Washington Square Park, smoking marijuana, shouting anti-gay slurs and participating in a mob beating.

BEFORE 'KIDS'

Raised in the East Village, Mr. Hunter was well known in the skating world when he was cast. As with Mr. Pierce, his character was written for him. "A lot of the feel and essence of that movie is him," Mr. Korine said. "He was just completely fearless. He worked the street, performing, trying to pick up girls or get clothes."

MEMORABLE SCENE

One night, the gang breaks into a closed swimming pool, and Harold, clad only in sagging briefs, hushes the group and gyrates so that his private parts make fleshy slapping noises. "Harold stole that scene," Mr. Fitzpatrick said. "I'm almost positive that it was written into the script that he did that, but those sound effects aren't fake." The scene also broke the ice among the young, nervous actors. "That was when we started jelling," he added.

AFTER 'KIDS'

In 2006, Mr. Hunter died of a heart attack at 31, reportedly caused by drug use. "Harold told me on the L train that we were going to get married," Ms. Dawson said. "He lived right down the block from me, and he died in the same place. It's very sad. But legends never die."



Chloë Sevigny

ROLE

Jennie, the film's tragic heroine, who learns that she contracted H.I.V. from Telly. In the film's final scene, after she tracks him down at a house party, Jennie passes out on a couch and is raped by Casper.

BEFORE 'KIDS'

Although Ms. Sevigny now describes herself as a "super-skinny, dorky blond girl from Connecticut" when cast, she was already a burgeoning "it" girl. By 1994, she had already appeared in a Sonic Youth video and as a model in *Sassy* and *Paper* magazines. A New Yorker profile that year noted that "downtown style-chieftains and scenesters" were comparing her to Twiggy, Audrey Hepburn and Edie Sedgwick.

The realism of her role brought a different kind of attention. "I remember people hugging me and thinking it really happened," she said. "Kids crying, 'Oh, my God, I feel this way, too,' or 'I have H.I.V.' I was happy that it was resonating with kids. It also made me wary of being a public figure and giving over your anonymity."

MEMORABLE SCENE

In one of the film's few tranquil moments, Jennie rides in a yellow taxi driven by a crusty cabby who expresses concern that she looks troubled. After she concedes that "everything is wrong," he cheers her up with life-affirming wisdom. "The cabdriver wasn't an actor, he was a rug salesman that the production designer knew," Mr. Clark said. "He had this incredible voice. When he came in and started reading, I thought I was

listening to Moses."

AFTER 'KIDS'

Ms. Sevigny went on to star in "Boys Don't Cry," which earned her an Oscar nomination, and on five seasons of "Big Love" on HBO. She has also designed several clothing collections for Opening Ceremony. "Chloë's style has always been something that fashion people have followed," said Humberto Leon, a founder of Opening Ceremony. "I feel like her collections have a playfulness from her teenage years up to now." Ms. Sevigny's eclectic style is the subject of a new book published by Rizzoli, "Chloë Sevigny," that documents her looks over the last 25 years.



Larry Clark

ROLE

Director. "Kids" was Mr. Clark's directorial debut. "My idea was to make a film that had never been made," he said. "By hanging out with these kids so long, they finally let me into a world where no adults were allowed." Other than the story line about Jennie, nearly everything in the film was based on events that he and Mr. Korine had witnessed.

BEFORE 'KIDS'

A documentarian of youth culture, Mr. Clark first provoked controversy in 1971 when he published "Tulsa," a harrowing photography book revealing sex, violence and drug use in his Oklahoma hometown. His next book, "Teenage Lust," attracted the same kind of outrage that later surrounded "Kids."

"If you look at all my work, I'm always about three years early," Mr. Clark said. "So the kids who saw the film said: 'Gee, man, this gets what's happening. This is real.' Whereas a lot of parents said, 'It's a dirty old man's fantasy.' All you had to do was read the newspapers over the next few years, and everything was true."

MEMORABLE SCENE

Telly and Casper arrive at Washington Square Park, which spurs a montage of ritualistic handshakes, dice rolling and marijuana smoking. It faithfully evoked the world in which Mr. Clark had immersed himself on a daily basis; he even learned to skate in order to keep up. "I broke my shoulder," he said. "My knees are messed up like crazy today. I paid the price, but I really, really wanted to do it. Finally they accepted me. I was

like one of the kids, even though I was almost 50."

AFTER 'KIDS'

Mr. Clark followed "Kids" with other films that depicted wayward youth subculture, including "Bully," "Ken Park" and "Wassup Rockers." In 2014, he revisited skate culture, this time adding modernities like online pornography, in the film "The Smell of Us." "I don't know if any other adults give kids the same respect that Larry does," said Mr. Fitzpatrick, who organized a 2014 gallery show of Mr. Clark's snapshots, which sold for \$100 each. "Larry is a kid at heart. He just happens to be a lot older than them."