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James Toback

James Toback (/ˈtoʊbæk/; born November 23, 1944) is an American film director and screenwriter. His screenplay for *Bugsy* won the 1991 Los Angeles Film Critics Association award for best screenplay of the year^[1] and was nominated for both the Academy Award for best original screenplay and for the Golden Globe best screenplay award.^{[2][3]} Toback's documentary *Tyson*, which he directed and co-produced, was featured at the 2008 Cannes Film Festival, winning a prize in the festival's *Un Certain Regard* section.^[4] That film was nominated for best documentary awards in several United States competitions.^[5] In 2009, the San Francisco International Film Festival selected Toback for its annual Kanbar Award for excellence in screenwriting.^[6]

Filmmaker Nicholas Jarecki examined Toback in a 2005 documentary *The Outsider: A Film about James Toback*. Interspliced with a narrative tracking Toback's 2004 whirlwind creation of *When Will I Be Loved*, Jarecki puts a "Who is James Toback?" question to multiple luminaries who know Toback through their collaborations in his work and in his personal life.^[7] For Toback, work and personal life sometimes blend. His first major film success was authoring *The Gambler* in 1974. It won a Golden Globe Best Actor nomination for James Caan as a compulsive gambler heavily in debt to the mob.^[8] In

The Outsider, when asked how he first met Toback, Jeff Berg, Toback's agent at that time, answered, "He walked into my office. We had never met each other and he asked for a loan of \$275,000 because he had some pressing gambling obligations that had to be satisfied."^[9]

In late 2017, the "Weinstein effect" that followed media reports of film producer Harvey Weinstein's abusive conduct with women gave rise to a flood of #MeToo revelations and allegations, and many of these named Toback.^[10]

James Toback

Toback in 2009

Born	November 23, 1944 <div>Manhattan, New York City, U.S.</div>
Occupation	Film director, screenwriter
Spouse(s)	Consuelo Sarah Churchill Vanderbilt Russell (1968–1969; divorced) <div>Stephanie Kempf (m. 1992)</div>

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Early life

Toback was born and raised in Manhattan, New York City, the only child in a well-to-do household. His mother, Selma Judith (née Levy), was a president of the League of Women Voters and a moderator of political debates on NBC.^[11] His father, Irwin Lionel Toback, was a stockbroker and later vice president of Dreyfus Corporation.

Toback graduated from The Fieldston School in 1963 and from Harvard College, *magna cum laude*, in 1966. At Harvard, he edited the undergraduate literary magazine. After college, Toback worked first as a journalist. An assignment from Esquire to write about football great and actor Jim Brown led to Brown's invitation to host Toback for an extended stay in Brown's Hollywood Hills home. Brown said that "along with both of us liking girls, I just like his intellect."^[12] Afterward, Toback wrote a book about his experiences as Brown's house guest: *Jim: The Author's Self-Centered Memoir of the Great Jim Brown* (1971). At the time, Toback was lecturing in the English Department at City College of New York.

Film career



Toback at Cannes in 2013

Toback credits actress and friend Lucy Saroyan, his literary agent Lynn Nesbit, and Nesbit's contact in film Mike Medavoy with getting his first film script *The Gambler* to director Karel Reisz and then to Paramount Pictures.^[13] For a year, Toback attached himself to Reisz "as his acolyte"^[14] in "the perfect mentor-protegé relationship,"^[15] and he later described Reisz, who also directed *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, as "my one-man film school."^[13] *The Gambler* opened in theaters in 1974.

Toback's directorial début was the 1978 film *Fingers*, with Harvey Keitel cast in the lead role of Jimmy "Fingers" Angelelli. In her review of *Fingers*, influential New Yorker film critic Pauline Kael celebrated Toback's "true moviemaking fever."^[16] Toback followed *Fingers* with *Love and Money* in 1982. He wrote and directed *Exposed* in 1983, *The Pick-up Artist* in 1987, and the documentary *The Big Bang* in 1989. *Bugsy* released two years later, with Toback's screenplay winning an Oscar nomination for best original screenplay.

In the three decades since *Bugsy* Toback has directed seven more films, including his prize-winning *Tyson*. He wrote the screenplays for all seven. Over his career, Toback's film direction has

ranged from the large-scale and spectacular *Exposed*^[17] to the small-scale and single-setting *Two Girls and a Guy*,^[18] one of three Toback films that cast Robert Downey Jr in a featured role. The Oldenburg International Film Festival selected Toback and his work for its 2008 "Retrospective."^[19] Other directors have since re-made two Toback films: *The Beat That My Heart Skipped*, a re-make of *Fingers*, in 2005, and Rupert Wyatt's re-make of *The Gambler* in 2014.

Critical reception

Toback's films have drawn a mixed response. Many if not most of the films deal with gambling, danger, sex, and death, topics that Toback's cast members examine through intense heady dialog, in a story often punctuated by violence and sometimes leavened by humor.

Film executive Richard Albarino is quoted as saying of Toback, "He never wrote or made anything he hadn't experienced first. He can't write fiction; he can only write diaries and dramatize them."^[20]

Owen Gleiberman, chief film critic for *Variety*, called Toback's 2017 *An Imperfect Murder* "a thrift-shop psychological X-ray that demands to be taken on its own Tobackian terms. But even on those terms, it spends too much time telling us things that it should be showing us."

Critic Roger Ebert, who panned *The Pick-up Artist* but praised Toback's other films,^[21] said of Toback that as a director, "He's alive. He's in your face. He's trying. He's trying to do something amazing. And to see somebody trying to do that even if they don't always succeed is much more interesting than to see somebody who is not even trying to do it in the first place."^[22]

Personal life

Toback and his wife Stephanie Kempf, married since 1992, live in New York. Kempf had edited Toback's first documentary *The Big Bang* in 1989.^[23] They have one son. Toback had an early and brief first marriage to Consuelo Sarah Churchill Vanderbilt Russell,^[24] the granddaughter of John Spencer-Churchill, 10th Duke of Marlborough.

Sexual misconduct allegations

In October 2017, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that 38 women had accused Toback of sexual misconduct.^[25] This was preceded by reports from *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker*, alleging that film producer Harvey Weinstein had similarly engaged in sexual misconduct with multiple women, and had been affording their silence through intimidation and bribery.^{[26][27]} shortly after Toback denied the allegations. In a 2018 follow-up, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that nearly 400 additional women had contacted the newspaper claiming harassment.^[28] Toback denied these claims, also. Only five allegations were presented to authorities as potential crimes. Los Angeles County prosecutors dismissed the charges, citing the statute of limitations.^[29]

Filmography

Year	Title	Director	Writer	Producer	Notes
1974	<i>The Gambler</i>	No	Yes	No	
1978	<i>Fingers</i>	Yes	Yes	No	
1982	<i>Love and Money</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	
1983	<i>Exposed</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	
1987	<i>The Pick-up Artist</i>	Yes	Yes	No	
1991	<i>Bugsy</i>	No	Yes	No	Nominated- <u>Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay</u> Nominated- <u>Golden Globe Award for Best Screenplay</u>
1997	<i>Two Girls and a Guy</i>	Yes	Yes	No	
1999	<i>Black and White</i>	Yes	Yes	No	
2001	<i>Harvard Man</i>	Yes	Yes	No	
2004	<i>When Will I Be Loved</i>	Yes	Yes	No	
2017	<i>The Private Life of a Modern Woman</i>	Yes	Yes	No	Later re-titled <i>An Imperfect Murder</i>

Documentary films

Year	Title	Director	Writer	Producer
1989	<i>The Big Bang</i>	Yes	Yes	No
2008	<i>Tyson</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes
2013	<i>Seduced and Abandoned</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes

Acting roles

- *Exposed* (1983) ... Leo Boscovitch
- *Alice* (1990) ... Professor Davis
- *Bugsy* (1991) ... Gus Greenbaum
- *Black and White* (1999) ... Arnie Tishman
- *Death of a Dynasty* (2003) ... Lyor Cohen
- *When Will I Be Loved* (2004) ... Professor Hassan Al-Ibrahim Ben Rabinowitz
- *The Outsider* (2005) ... Himself (Documentary)
- *Mississippi Grind* (2015) ... Tony Roundtree

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External links

- James Toback (<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0864812/>) at IMDb
- Director James Toback on the Charlie Rose Show (<https://www.bloomberg.com/video/-seduced-and-abandoned-charlie-rose-11-05-ot9EeioTTqG4UgyCVbYyog.html>)

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