

Harvey Weinstein's Stunning Downfall: 23 Years in Prison

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Harvey Weinstein, the movie producer who dominated Hollywood for decades, was sentenced on Wednesday to 23 years in prison for sex crimes, as the six women who had testified against him watched from the courtroom's front row, holding one another, some in tears.

The long sentence meant that Mr. Weinstein, who is 67 and in poor health, could very well spend the rest of his life in prison.

Minutes before, Mr. Weinstein, who was sitting in a wheelchair, had said that he was remorseful but also "totally confused" about what had happened to him. He likened his experience to that of Hollywood figures blacklisted during the scare over communism in the 1950s.

The moment capped a precipitous fall from power for Mr. Weinstein that started in October 2017 when, after years of rumors, several women openly accused him of sexual assault and harassment.

Their stories led women around the world to speak about mistreatment at the hands of powerful men, shifting the cultural landscape with the #MeToo movement.

Justice James A. Burke, who presided over the trial in State Supreme Court in Manhattan, could have sentenced Mr. Weinstein to as little as five years, but he heeded the arguments of prosecutors who urged him to hand down a much longer sentence.

The judge said that while Mr. Weinstein had no criminal record, several women had testified about other sexual assaults beyond the two for which he had been found guilty.

"Although this is a first conviction, it is not a first offense," Justice Burke said. "There is evidence before me of other incidents of sexual assault involving a number of women, all of which are legitimate considerations for sentence."

In court on Wednesday, two of Mr. Weinstein's victims gave emotional statements about the damage he had done to them. Miriam Haley, who testified that Mr. Weinstein forced oral sex on her in 2006, said he had forever altered her life, crushing her spirit.

"He, with physical force, violated my trust, my body and my basic right to reject his sexual advances," she said. "I showed up not as a perfect victim, but as a human being."

Jessica Mann, an aspiring actress who testified that Mr. Weinstein had raped her in a Manhattan hotel in 2013, asked for a lengthy prison sentence, saying it was time for “people who rape other humans” to pay a heavy price.

“I’m not going to give any more power over to the man who already stole my body,” Ms. Mann said.

Given a chance to speak, Mr. Weinstein gave a rambling, 10-minute speech to the court. He said that he thought his relationships with the women were consensual and suggested that he was the victim of a rush to judgment.

“We may have different truths, but I have great remorse for all of you,” he said, addressing his accusers, but never apologizing to them. “I have great remorse for all the men and women going through this crisis right now in our country.”

He said the #MeToo movement was similar to the Red Scare of the 1950s and compared himself to the screenwriter Dalton Trumbo, who was jailed and blacklisted after joining the Communist Party. “I think that is what is happening now all over this country,” Mr. Weinstein said.

Still, Mr. Weinstein, who listed his work for charities and achievements in the film industry, said his empathy for others had grown in the last two years. “I really feel remorse for this situation,” he said. “I feel it deeply in my heart. I’m really trying, I’m really trying to be a better person.”

Justice Burke was unmoved. He gave Mr. Weinstein 20 years for the felony attack on Ms. Haley and an additional three years for the rape of Ms. Mann.

Mr. Weinstein’s reaction could not be seen because he was surrounded by court officers. He was handcuffed, wheeled out of court and sent back to Rikers Island, the city’s jail complex.

But when he arrived there at about 6 p.m. on Wednesday, he experienced chest pains and was taken to Bellevue Hospital Center for evaluation, his spokesman, Juda Engelmayer, said.

The Manhattan district attorney, Cyrus R. Vance Jr., who attended much of the trial, applauded the judge’s decision and thanked the women who helped to put Mr. Weinstein behind bars.

“They refused to be silent, and they were heard,” he said in a statement. “Their words took down a predator and put him behind bars, and gave hope to survivors of sexual violence all across the world.”

Outside of the courthouse, Mr. Weinstein’s lawyers vowed to appeal. They called the sentence “obscene” and said the judge had caved in to political pressure.

His lead counsel, Donna Rotunno, noted that some murderers had received less time than Mr. Weinstein. "That number did not speak to the evidence that came out to trial," she said.

In Los Angeles, the district attorney's office announced it had begun the process of extraditing Mr. Weinstein to California to face rape and sexual assault charges there. In January, prosecutors in Los Angeles County charged him in connection with attacks on two women in February 2013.

A Manhattan jury of seven men and five women found Mr. Weinstein guilty on Feb. 25 of first-degree criminal sexual act and third-degree rape after five days of deliberations.

However, the jury acquitted Mr. Weinstein of the most serious charges against him: two counts of predatory sexual assault, which required prosecutors to prove that he had committed a serious sexual assault against at least two women.

Those charges, as structured in the indictment by prosecutors, required the jury to find Mr. Weinstein had raped the actress Annabella Sciorra in the early 1990s at her Gramercy Park apartment. But some jurors said they doubted her account.

The jury also determined Mr. Weinstein was not guilty of first-degree rape in the 2013 attack on Ms. Mann. That charge required the state to prove the use of force or a threat during the attack. The jury instead opted to convict him of third-degree rape, which required prosecutors to prove only that she did not consent.

Three other women — Dawn Dunning, Tarale Wulff and Lauren Young — also testified at the trial. All were aspiring actresses who said Mr. Weinstein lured them into private meetings to discuss their careers then sexually assaulted them.

Mr. Weinstein was not charged in those cases, because they were too old to be prosecuted or happened outside New York. Still, Justice Burke allowed the three women to testify to establish a pattern of behavior.

"No one thought we would be here today," said Ms. Wulff, speaking to reporters outside of the courthouse. "No one thought Harvey would ever see a courtroom. I feel a sense of happiness. I hope the sentence sends a clear message that times have changed."

Before Mr. Weinstein was charged, reports about his sexual misconduct had been circulating in Hollywood for decades, even as the producer won critical acclaim for Oscar-winners like "Shakespeare in Love" and "Pulp Fiction" and reshaped the film industry.

But in late 2017, several of his accusers went public in investigations published by The New York Times and The New Yorker. Since then, more than 90 women have accused Mr. Weinstein of misconduct, including harassment, inappropriate touching and sexual assault.

Arguing for a lengthy sentence, prosecutors had pointed to a long list of allegations from other women who said Mr. Weinstein had sexually assaulted them, going back to an employee who said he raped her on a business trip in 1978.

The lead prosecutor, Joan Illuzzi, told the court that people who knew Mr. Weinstein described him as a sociopathic manipulator and a “monster” who used his power in the film industry to prey on women.

“He held the dreams of many people in his hand,” she said. “He saw no limit to what he could take, no desire he could not grant himself. The young struggling dreamers were not even people to him”

Ms. Rotunno urged the judge to take into account Mr. Weinstein’s fragile health, noting a long prison term would be a “de facto life sentence.” She also argued before sentencing that the intense coverage of Mr. Weinstein’s case made a fair trial impossible.

“Mr. Weinstein came in with the forces of the media, the forces of the world pushing against the chance for him to ever have a real impartial jury in this case,” she said.