



TREASURES FROM THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE

AN ONGOING SERIES OF CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY FILMS PRESENTED IN 35MM BY THE YALE FILM STUDY CENTER

THURSDAY
MARCH 2, 2017

8:00PM • WHITNEY
HUMANITIES CENTER

THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS

PRESENTED WITH
SUPPORT FROM
PAUL L. JOSKOW
'70 M.PHIL., '72 PH.D.



With intimacy and immediacy, Gillo Pontecorvo's *THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS* takes us deep into the prison and the Casbah, moving us through checkpoints and across barbed wire into insurgent hiding spots, police torture rooms, and clandestine bomb-making sites. It doesn't attempt to tell the whole story of Algeria's war for independence from French colonial rule, but instead focuses on one campaign carried out between 1954 and 1957.

Pontecorvo was born in 1919 to an affluent family in Pisa. He moved to Paris as a tennis pro in his late teens, a move inspired in part by the growing anti-Semitism he faced in Italy. After the outbreak of World War II, he joined the Italian Communist Party and became a leader of the Resistance in Milan, learning first-hand many of the urban warfare techniques depicted in *THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS*. After the war, he worked as a photojournalist until a screening of Roberto Rossellini's *PAISÀ* inspired him to buy a 16mm camera and devote himself to filmmaking. After initially focusing on documentaries, he received widespread acclaim for his second feature, the Oscar-nominated *KAPÒ*. Pontecorvo's writing partner for *KAPÒ* was Franco Solinas, who also worked with him on the screenplays for *THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS* and *BURN!*, and whose later work included *MONSIEUR KLEIN* for Joseph Losey and *STATE OF SIEGE* for Costa-Gavras.



Solinas and Pontecorvo originally had a very different idea—and a very different lead actor—in mind for their Algerian War story: Paul Newman was their first choice to star in *PARÀ*, their tale of a French paratrooper-turned-journalist. Film scholar Peter Matthews said the treatment for that unproduced film is “a story about Newman's inner turmoil and only secondarily relates the far more ponderable misery of the Algerian people.” Meanwhile, the Algerian FLN party was interested in their own film about the war, and military chief Saadi Yacef approached Pontecorvo with his own script, which Pontecorvo found to be far too propagandistic. Pontecorvo nonetheless agreed to work with Algeria's government-controlled Casbah Films to create a film that would speak to both Western and Algerian audiences.

DIRECTED BY **GILLO PONTECORVO**
WRITTEN BY **GILLO PONTECORVO** AND
FRANCO SOLINAS
(1966) 121 MINS.

STARRING **SAADI YACEF, JEAN MARTIN,**
BRAHIM HADJADJ, AND SAIA KERBASH

Greatly influenced by Italian neorealists, Pontecorvo opted for non-professional actors, and he cast Brahim Hadjadj in the role of Ali La Pointe after spotting him at a market. In addition to co-producing the film, Saadi Yacef played FLN commander El-hadi Jaffar, a character based on himself. The only professional actor in the cast was Jean Martin in the role of Colonel Mathieu, a composite of several French officers. Martin was primarily a stage actor, though he had earlier been blacklisted for signing the Manifesto of the 121 against the Algerian War.

THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS premiered at the Venice Film Festival on August 31, 1966, where it won the Golden Lion. However, it was banned in France until 1971, and French screenings of the film drew protests well into the 1980s. Though widely lauded, the film developed a reputation as being, in the words of critic Chris Nashawaty, “both a how-to manual for guerrilla terrorism and a cautionary tale about how to fight it.” It was embraced by the Black Panthers and the IRA, but also used in counter-insurgency training courses in Argentina. A 2003 Pentagon screening was promoted as a look at “how to win a battle against terrorism and lose the war of ideas.” In the assessment of critic Mike D'Angelo, “It neither demonizes nor lionizes either side of the conflict, aiming for just-the-ugly facts objectivity. Nobody who sees it is likely to feel comforted, or even vindicated. The emotion it most frequently and fervently inspires is sorrow.”

DID YOU KNOW: THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS IS THE ONLY FILM TO RECEIVE ACADEMY AWARD NOMINATIONS IN TWO NON-CONSECUTIVE YEARS. IT WAS NOMINATED FOR BEST FOREIGN LANGUAGE FILM OF 1966, AND IT WENT ON TO RECEIVE NOMINATIONS FOR SCREENPLAY AND DIRECTION FOR 1968 FOLLOWING ITS U.S. RELEASE.

NEXT UP: IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE EXHIBITION *ENLIGHTENED PRINCESSES: CAROLINE, AUGUSTA, CHARLOTTE, AND THE SHAPING OF THE MODERN WORLD* ON VIEW AT THE YALE CENTER FOR BRITISH ART UNTIL APRIL 30, 2017, A 35MM SCREENING OF **THE MADNESS OF KING GEORGE** (1994), DIRECTED BY NICHOLAS HYTNER, ON **THURSDAY, MARCH 9 AT 7:00 P.M.**