

TREASURES FROM THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE

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

EIGHT MEN OUT

THURSDAY, JUNE 22, 2023

7 P.M. • HUMANITIES

QUADRANGLE

LECTURE HALL

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



John Sayles: "I had heard of the Black Sox scandal when I was a kid, wondering how could anybody be so low as to throw the World Series?" In his twenties, after reading Eliot Asinof's detailed non-fiction book *Eight Men Out* (1963), Sayles was convinced that the White Sox players got involved in fixing the 1919 Series less from greed than from their exploitation by greedy ownership: that this was a larger story of labor vs. capital. Inspired by *ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN* (1976) and the similarities between Watergate and the Black Sox conspiracies and coverups, Sayles wrote a screenplay, complete with storyboards, in 1977—three years before his directorial debut, *RETURN OF THE SECAUCUS SEVEN*. He was finally able to realize the project in 1988 thanks to then-flourishing Orion Pictures.

EIGHT MEN OUT is about, among other things, the loss of innocence. The opening (starting with a dynamic camera movement accompanied by Mason Daring's jaunty Dixieland score) evokes an exciting world where two young Chicago boys—with two bits earned by hawking newspapers—root for their idealized White Sox from the distant bleachers. Sayles brings us to close-up reality by cutting to two cynical reporters, Hugh Fullerton (Studs Terkel) and Ring Lardner (John Sayles) in the press box. Both pairs recur throughout as quasi-Greek choruses, the wide-eyed kids remaining loyal to their idols, the jaded writers growing increasingly suspicious and publishing exposés in the very newspapers the kids sell.

The film is a model of exposition, as Sayles quickly introduces White Sox owner Charles Comiskey (Clifton James), who rewards his players with flat champagne while wining and dining the reporters, and who creates myths for the writers about a unified team that is in fact disunited; two sleazy gamblers who hatch the scheme; the team's tough but sensitive manager (John Mahoney); and key team members, whom Sayles clearly delineates despite superficial resemblances. Sayles involves us particularly with three players (whose wives are also shown): naive Shoeless Joe Jackson (D.B. Sweeney), honest Buck Weaver (John Cusack), and tragic Eddie Cicotte (David Strathairn). Widening his focus to legendary gangster Arnold Rothstein (Michael Lerner), a web of double and triple crosses, and corrupt baseball and legal structures, Sayles paints a large picture of America at the dawn of the Roaring Twenties.

Determined not to use real ball players as doubles, Sayles chose actors who could be convincing as professionals, their believability aided by Robert Richardson's camera positions and John Tintori's editing. To recreate the games, Sayles used actual Series box scores that "not only indicated hits, runs, and errors, but what happened on each play. So, I kept literally with who did what, just dropping the needle down at different points to tell the story of that particular game." Indianapolis's Bush Stadium served as both Chicago's Comiskey Park and Cincinnati's Redland Field, which involved changing the scoreboard, the advertisements, even the dirt. Sayles had the games broken down into different moods, "but because the weather in Indianapolis would often change at lunch, we'd often shoot sections from several different games on the same day." One of Sayles's biggest challenges was filling the stands: the lack of enough extras necessitated long lenses blurring the background, dark lighting for the crowd, and even life-sized cardboard cutouts.

The reviews were almost unanimously enthusiastic. Sheila Benson (*Los Angeles Times*): "(Sayles) has woven each of the story's complex strands—moral, psychological, political, journalistic, personal—into a watershed American drama that's rich and clear." Janet Maslin (*New York Times*): "It's much more than film about baseball. It's an amazingly full and heartbreaking vision of the dreams, aspirations and disillusionments of a nation, as filtered through its national pastime...*EIGHT MEN OUT* represents a home run."

For more than four decades, John Sayles has been one of the foremost artists of independent cinema. His acclaimed works include *THE BROTHER FROM ANOTHER PLANET*, *MATEWAN*, *CITY OF HOPE*, *PASSION FISH*, *LONE STAR*, *MEN WITH GUNS*, *SUNSHINE STATE*, and *HONEYDRIPPER*. As critic Jim Hemphill has said, "Few directors in the history of American film have presented a perspective on the human condition as complex, varied, and compassionate as John Sayles." The Yale Film Archive is honored to welcome him to tonight's screening.



DIRECTED BY **JOHN SAYLES**

WRITTEN BY **JOHN SAYLES**

FROM A BOOK BY **ELIOT ASINOF**

CINEMATOGRAPHY BY **ROBERT RICHARDSON**

PRODUCED BY **ORION PICTURES** (1988), 119 MINS.

STARRING **JOHN CUSACK, CLIFTON JAMES, MICHAEL LERNER, CHRISTOPHER LLOYD, JOHN MAHONEY, MICHAEL ROOKER, CHARLIE SHEEN, DAVID STRATHAIRN, AND D.B. SWEENEY**

DID YOU KNOW: THE 1919 WORLD SERIES (LIKE THOSE OF 1902, 1920, AND 1921) WAS A BEST-OF-NINE SERIES, DEPARTING FROM THE STANDARD BEST-OF-SEVEN IN AN ATTEMPT TO INCREASE REVENUE.

NEXT UP: DIRECTOR ANG LEE'S GROUNDBREAKING 2000 MARTIAL ARTS EPIC **CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON** STARS CHOW YUN-FAT, MICHELLE YEOH, AND ZHANG ZIYI. THE MOST SUCCESSFUL FOREIGN LANGUAGE FILM IN AMERICAN BOX OFFICE HISTORY SCREENS IN 35MM, **7 P.M. THURSDAY, JULY 20**