

**WHY THEY HATE US:
CINEMATIC VISIONS OF “THE OTHER SIDE”**

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*O wad some Power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us!*
– Robert Burns, “To a Louse” (1786)

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Description

Since September 11, one of the pressing questions of our time has been: why do “they” (Arabs? Muslims? Terrorists?) hate “us” (America? The West? Infidels?). Is it because they hate our freedoms? Or because they want to share our freedoms and hate our policies? Or something else? Through a careful consideration of 6 films (some made by “us”, some made by “them”) supplemented by selected readings (including al Qaeda communiqués), we will seek, in Robert Burns’s words, “to see oursels as ithers see us”.

Readings

1. Chomsky, Noam. *Hegemony or Survival: America’s Quest for Global Dominance*. (Holt, 2004). ISBN: 0805076883.
2. Ibrahim, Raymond (ed. & trans.). *The Al Qaeda Reader*. (Broadway, 2007). ISBN: 9780767922623.

Films

1. **Where in the World is Osama bin Laden?** Dir. Morgan Spurlock. 2008. (93 min.)
2. **Battle of Algiers**. Dir. Gillo Pontecorvo. 1966. (121 min.)
3. **Lion of the Desert**. Dir. Moustapha Akkad. 1981. (173 min.)
4. **Paradise Now**. Dir. Hany Abu-Assad. 2005. (90 min.)
5. **Syriana**. Dir. Stephen Gaghan. 2005. (126 min.)
6. **Redacted**. Dir. Brian De Palma. 2007 (90 min.)

Schedule

| Wk | Film | Readings |
|----|--|--|
| 1 | Where in the World is Osama bin Laden? (2008) Spurlock, 93 min | |
| 2 | Battle of Algiers (1966) Pontecorvo, 121 min | <u>Chomsky</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1: Priorities and Prospects • 2: Imperial Grand Strategy <u>Ibrahim</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Prefatory Material] |
| 3 | Lion of the Desert (1981) Akkad, 173 min | <u>Chomsky</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3: The New Era of Enlightenment • 4: Dangerous Times <u>Ibrahim</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Themes (17-21) |
| 4 | Paradise Now (2005) Abu-Assad, 90 min | <u>Chomsky</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5: The Iraq Connection • 6: Dilemmas of Dominance <u>Ibrahim</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ayman al-Zawahiri Interview (5) |
| 5 | Syriana (2005) Gaghan, 126 min | <u>Chomsky</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7: Cauldron of Animosity • 8: Terrorism and Justice: Some Useful Truisms <u>Ibrahim</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Messages to the Americans (6-11) |
| 6 | Redacted (2007) De Palma, 90 min | <u>Chomsky</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9: A Passing Nightmare? • Afterword <u>Ibrahim</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate Islam is a Prostration to the West (1) |

Where in the World is Osama bin Laden? (2008 / Spurlock / 93 min)

Amazed by Osama bin Laden's success at evading capture, gung-ho Spurlock sets out to locate the Al Qaeda leader in a manhunt that takes him to Egypt, Morocco, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and finally Pakistan (where most fingers point). Bin Laden is always one step ahead, but along the way the documentarian forms a picture of the Middle Eastern populations whose fates are inextricably intertwined with those in the United States. Who are these people? What are the culture and socioeconomic determinants of radical fundamentalism? Who in the Middle East appreciates a good joke? Determined to get his man and some answers, Spurlock leaves no stone unturned. It's dizzying to witness him ambling amiably into ultra-Orthodox Israeli neighborhoods and a Saudi mosque, where God's wrath is invoked against America, as well as the malls and supermarkets peopled by moderates who are seldom seen on the nightly news: just the kind of temperature reading many Americans would like to take, if they dared. [Sundance.org]

Battle of Algiers (1966 / Pontecorvo / 121 min)

Internationally acclaimed, the staggering newsreel-like authenticity of the staged street riots and vital performances of the actors give *Battle of Algiers* a unique dramatic impact on this detailing of the Algerian revolt against the French. Winner of the Golden Lion at the 1965 Venice International Film Festival. "Probably the most emotionally stirring revolutionary epic since Eisenstein's *Potemkin* (Pauline Kael). In French/Arabic with English subtitles. [Facets]

Lion of the Desert (1981 / Akkad / 173 min)

Moustapha Akkad (*The Message*) returns with this spectacle set in the Libyan desert. Benito Mussolini (Rod Steiger) and General Rodolfo Graziani (Oliver Reed) try to crush the rebellion of Bedouin patriots led by Anthony Quinn against Italian colonialists in 1929 Africa. English and Arabic language options. [Facets]

Paradise Now (2005 / Abu-Assad / 90 min)

Two Palestinian men--a mechanic living in Nablus (Kais Nashif) and his quick-tempered childhood friend (Ali Suliman)--are selected to carry out a suicide bombing in Tel Aviv in Hany Abu-Assad's acclaimed, gripping drama. Given fresh haircuts, pressed suits, and explosive belts that will detonate during any attempt to remove them, the men sneak past Israeli troops and become separated, forced to wander alone and confront a wide range of devastating emotions. "This taut, ingeniously calculated thriller fixates on the flashpoint where psychology and politics ignite in self-destructive martyrdom" (Stephen Holden, *The New York Times*). In Arabic with English subtitles. [Facets]

Syriana (2005 / Gaghan / 126 min)

At once a taut geopolitical thriller and a scathing indictment of the global oil industry, this bracingly intelligent film boasts a complex web of storylines, all tied to a proposed merger between two American energy companies. Director Stephen Gaghan introduces a colorful cast of characters, including a frumpy CIA assassin (George Clooney), a

progressive Arab prince (Alexander Siddig), an ambitious Washington litigator (Jeffrey Wright), and a flashy energy analyst (Matt Damon), and arranges them within a narrative jigsaw puzzle that demands--and encourages--a very high level of attention. "What's so powerful about the film is the rich stories it tells and how it leads them like so many human tributaries to one black, bubbling source" (Desson Thomson, *Washington Post*). [Facets]

Redacted (2007 / De Palma / 90 min)

Of the many Iraq War movies released in 2007, none were as bold or as polarizing as Brian De Palma's *Redacted*. Employing an unknown cast, an amateur camera style, and the found-footage trope, De Palma constructed a fiery film based on the real-life rape and murder of a teenage Iraqi girl, who was then burned with the rest of her family by a handful of US Army soldiers in a town south of Baghdad. Though *Redacted* didn't do much at the box office, it earned the ire of right-wing commentator Bill O'Reilly ("vile"), the praise of left-leaning critics like Roger Ebert ("shocking"), J. Hoberman ("powerful"), and George Packer ("irony with a revolutionary point"), and won the Silver Lion at the Venice Film Festival. Shot on HD video by Jonathon Cliff. Edited by Bill Pankow. [Facets]