

ON THE WATERFRONT
(1954)

Background:

1. Story idea originated with Arthur Miller's abandoned scenario, The Hook, and Malcolm Johnson's Pulitzer Prize winning series of investigative articles for the New York Sun.

2. After his testimony before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) in 1952, Kazan began collaborating with Budd Schulberg on a script based on their shared experiences observing conditions on the docks and Malcolm Johnson's Crime on the Labor Front.

3. Filmed on location in Hoboken during near-zero temperatures and under threats from waterfront hoodlums. Marlon Brando was chosen for the part of Terry Malloy only after Frank Sinatra demanded too much money and Montgomery Clift was unavailable. Kazan and Schulberg had a great deal of difficulty selling the script to Hollywood before finally convincing Sam Spiegel to produce it for Horizon Pictures.

5. Kazan, Schulberg, and Lee J. Cobb had all recently provided testimony for HUAC before filming began. Kazan has acknowledged his identification with Terry Malloy but denies making the film primarily to defend his position as a "friendly" witness.

Critical Reception:

1. Academy Awards for Best Production (Spiegel), Best Screenplay (Schulberg), Best Direction (Kazan), Best Actor (Brando), Best Supporting Actress (Eva Marie Saint), Art Direction (Richard Day), Black and White Cinematography (Boris Kaufman), and Editing (Gene Milford).

2. Lindsay Anderson in Sight and Sound (1955) attacks the last sequence for its "demagogic dishonesty of argument" and "horrid vulgarity" of style. Most subsequent debate concerning On the Waterfront has concentrate on the film's political message as conveyed through its ending.

3. Roger Taillieur's book on Kazan (1966) argues that On the Waterfront must be viewed in the context of Kazan's testimony before HUAC and his consequent falling out with his old friend Arthur Miller. The film is seen as a defense of informing against that attack posed by Miller in his play, The Crucible.

4. Peter Biskind in Film Quarterly (1975) resumes the political interpretation but emphasizes Terry's awakening through the agency of the "ruthless crusader," Father Barry, who replaces Johnny Friendly's authoritarian coercion with a similar authoritarian manipulation in the service of society instead of the mob.

5. Kenneth Hey in American Quarterly (1979) examines the film as a collaborative creation of cultural significance whose argument corresponds closely to Kazan's statement before HUAC. The ambivalence of the movie's theme reflects Kazan's attitude toward his own testimony.

6. Following the historical approaches of Biskind and Hey, Victor Navasky in Naming Names (1980) argues that, far from being ambiguous, On the Waterfront "makes the definitive case for the HUAC informer."

Cinematic Qualities:

1. Acting - reflects Kazan's teaching of "The Method" at the Actors Studio. Note especially the famous taxicab scene between Brando and Rod Steiger, Brando's "pained resentment, restrained by love" (Louis Giannetti). On the Waterfront was the first film to have three members of the male cast (Cobb, Steiger, and Karl Malden) nominated for Best Supporting Actor. Many of the smaller roles are played by non-professionals.

2. Cinematography - Boris Kaufman's black-and-white photography using available light reflects the recent achievements of Italian neorealism, at once gritty and poetic.

3. Composition (mise-en scène) - While the roof seemingly represents freedom for Terry, he is frequently shot so as to appear confined within the coop wire. A screen separates Terry from Edie in their first scene together on the roof. Famous cab sequences begins with a series of off-center two-shots, the imbalance suggesting something other than the brotherhood Charlie seeks to impose.

4. Lyrical Scenes - balance the violent, emotionally charged moments: Terry and Edie's walk through the little park, his monologue in the swing (note long shots and long takes); night scene on the roof when Edie gives Terry her brother's jacket.

5. Symbolism - pigeons (both transcendence/love and informing), ship's loft and the hold (note especially Father Barry's sermon and his ascent with Kayo Dugan's body), Edie's glove, Joey's jacket, final shot of the shed (both refuge and prison).

6. Expressionism - Although the film's dominant style is realism, there are some (questionable) expressionistic elements: ship's steam whistle which drowns out Terry's confession to Edie, Leonard Bernstein's musical score, tilt and blurred focus during Terry's walk up the pier.

Major Themes:

1. Social/ Political - the justification and efficacy of informing. Compare with John Ford's The Informer.

2. Religious - Christian brotherhood vs. the conspiracy of evil; individual suffering as the way to redemption. Compare with Ustinov's Billy Budd.

3. Historical - the effort to reform labor racketeering and waterfront crime. Compare with Lumet's Serpico and Prince of the City.

4. Mythic - the "rights" of the individual, and the painful process of discovering and asserting them. Compare with Stallone's Rocky series.

Important Credits:

Cast: Marlon Brando (Terry Malloy), Eva Marie Saint (Edie Doyle), Karl Malden (Father Barry), Lee J. Cobb (Johnny Friendly), Rod Steiger (Charlie Malloy)

Producer: Sam Spiegel

Screenplay: Budd Schulberg, based upon his original story and suggested by articles by Malcolm Johnson

Cinematographer: Boris Kaufman

Music: Leonard Bernstein

The Taxi Cab Sequence in *On the Waterfront*

1. establishing 2-shot
2. cu 2-shot ("supoena")
3. reverse cu 2-shot *cut on "I get that for not doing anything"*
4. same as #2 *cut on "I don't know, Charlie"*
5. same as #3
6. same as #2 ("Make up your mind before we get to 437 River Street")
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7. cu of T
8. same as #3
9. 2-shot, same as #1 (C draws gun)
10. cu 2-shot, same as #2 ("Terry, take this job, please!")
11. same as #9 ("Wow!")
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12. cu of C ("How much you weigh, son?")
13. cu of T, same as #7
14. same as #12 ("... skunk of a manager brought you along too fast")
15. cu of T, same as #7 ("It was you")
16. 2-shot, same as #2 ("You shoulda look out for me")
17. cu of C ("I had some bets down on you")
18. cu of T (I coulda been a contender")
19. cu of C
20. cu of T ("It was you, Charlie")
21. 2-shot, same as #1