

## THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS (1966)

director: Gillo Pontecorvo

screenplay: Franco Solinas and Gillo Pontecorvo

cinematography: Marcello Gatti

music: Gillo Pontecorvo and Ennio Morricone

cast: Yacef Saadi (Saari Kader); Brahim Haggiag (Ali la Pointe);  
Jean Martin (Colonel Mathieu)

### Background:

**The Battle of Algiers** has become a classic of political filmmaking and **cinéma verité** style. Pontecorvo was deeply influenced by both Eisenstein (especially **October** and **Battleship Potemkin**) and Italian neorealism (especially Rossellini's **Paisa**). The film in turn influenced such later pseudo-documentaries as Costa-Gavras' **Z** (France, 1969) and Haskell Wexler's **Medium Cool** (USA, 1969). It employs the gamut of **verité** techniques--fast film stock, non-professional actors (except for Jean Martin), hand-held cameras, unbalanced compositions--in order to capture the look and feel of a newsreel. In addition to the opening written statement, however, the film announces itself to be a fiction through its narrative structure, which employs both a sustained flashback and a flash-forward epilogue.

The entire film was shot on location in the Casbah where the original events took place. Yacef Saadi, who plays the terrorist leader Saari Kader, was himself the organizer of the original resistance movement and a leader of the FLN.

### Topics for Discussion:

1. Some critics have questioned the ethics of creating a partly fictional narrative in such strikingly realistic terms. What happens to the "truth" of the historical events in Algeria when some of the protagonist's experiences have been invented by the filmmakers?
2. How does Pontecorvo attempt to achieve a balance between his partisanship for the Algerian cause and fair treatment for the French? Does the film lapse into caricature or political simplifications while advancing its revolutionary theme?
3. How have subsequent armed revolts in Third World countries and the worldwide escalation of political terrorism affected the contemporary reception of **The Battle of Algiers**?
4. What are the necessities for a successful political revolution? How does the film address each of these requirements?
5. Compare the treatment of historical events leading to revolution with Eisenstein's in **Battleship Potemkin**.
6. Consider the effect of the film-within-the-film, the "documentary" footage of Algerians crossing the checkpoints. What is the relationship between Mathieu's film and Pontecorvo's?
7. What is the effect and significance of the epilogue, the flash-forward to 1960?