

Watching *Battle of Algiers* in a Post-9/11 World

As Timothy Corrigan teaches in *A Short Guide to Writing about Film* (Pearson Longman, 2007), “your analysis will be better if you... spend at least some time on some general, preliminary questions. As far as possible, prepare yourself for a movie; even before it starts, ask questions about it and about your own potential interest in it” (19).

To that end, here is a brief synopsis of *Battle of Algiers* (1966) from imdb.com:

A film commissioned by the Algerian government that shows the Algerian revolution from both sides. The French foreign legion has left Vietnam in defeat and has something to prove. The Algerians are seeking independence. The two clash. The torture used by the French is contrasted with the Algerian's use of bombs in soda shops. A look at war as a nasty thing that harms and sullies everyone who participates in it. **Written by John Vogel**
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What does this summary make you ask? Maybe you want to learn more about the French in Vietnam. About the US in Vietnam? Why are the French in Algeria? What do you know about the history of urban guerilla warfare? In other words, history seems to be important. Go learn some (more) and use it in your essay.

Our goal in this class and, hopefully, in your life, is to always read films on multiple levels. This increases your understanding of not only the texts themselves, but also your self and your understanding of the world around you. With this in mind, some questions to ponder as you watch the film (**you should be taking notes as you watch**):

- What is the post-9/11 world of my assignment title? How might this film shed light on our current, post-9/11 era?
- How does the form of the film, its documentary style, affect how you understand it?
- Is this a positive or a negative film? Are there “good guys” and “bad guys”? Why or why not? Who are they? Is the film impartial (i.e., does the film take sides)?
- Does the film have a protagonist? Are there major characters, as you commonly understand them? What might this mean?
- Does the ending make sense? Is it satisfying?
- It's been said that, “one [wo]man's terrorist is another [wo]man's freedom fighter.” How does this relate to the film? Are such guerrilla tactics ever acceptable? Such police and military tactics?
- What are some aspects of symbolism in the film, and what do they mean? What signs do you see that are worth exploring?
- Why is the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre quoted in the film and what does this mean?
- Roger Ebert says in his review: “What lessons a modern viewer can gain from the film depends on who is watching and what they want to see.” What lessons do you see? Are they the lessons you want to see? Why or why not?

In a 500-ish word “complete” essay, **due Friday, February 16**. You should have a title, an epigraph, a strong, tightly controlled, and narrowly focused thesis, as well as supporting evidence from the film in the body of the paper, and a conclusion. We will discuss this further in class before it is due. After watching a significant film, it's good to read some reviews. You can find most of the best through rottetomatoes.com, even for a film over 50 years old.