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Politics thru Film – Spring 2006
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Casablanca – Movie Review

“Casablanca is the greatest movie ever made.”
-- Phil Laemmle

In deed, Casablanca is a fine, fine, piece of classic American cinema. It is an “A” film, or “level one”. The production values earn high marks all around, which shall now be addressed individually.

It is evident that the studio placed a heavy emphasis on the technical production aspects of Casablanca. The lighting was flawless. The filmmakers included a touch of noir that was seamlessly blended, providing the right balance of lightness to dark emphasis. Films going overboard in respect to the noir element ultimately become unpleasant to watch, because it impedes the viewer's development and comprehension of the visual composition of the framed scene.

The camera work was expertly executed, framing and composing each scene as if it were a photographic still portrait. Additionally, the art and set direction / construction were visually sound and impressive. The interior of Rick's Café was elegant, classy, and vibrant (especially impressive because the film is in black and white), in comparison to the seedy Blue Parrot (a point driven home thru the action of constant fly swatting) across the way.

The story was riveting. The dialogue, inspired, witty, and nuanced, thus elevating Casablanca to numerous-famous-quotes status. The love story and the political saga served as two nested, perfectly integrated storylines, each serving to enhance and fuel the other. The editing was consistent and conducive to the overall narrative.

Casablanca embraces the prevailing political culture of its time by demonizing the Nazi regime and exonerating the noble leaders of the underground resistance, who are standing in opposition to the Third Reich and its enterprise of spreading European fascism. The film also confronts the issue of race in American society. Sam, the piano man, is treated with great dignity, reverence, and respect. This sends the message that African Americans are of value and have talent. Rick's character went so far as to divvy out 25% of his profits to Sam. This was a bold, daring gesture for the times.

Fighting the "good fight" is the prevailing conclusion. The resolve is the bitter sweet loss of love accompanied by the truest expression of love and the acquisition of moral human decency in its exchange. The music added a necessary sentimental touch, which directly appealed to viewers causing them to personally identify with the characters.

The casting choices were effective. Victor's character was idealistic, boyish, and believably honorable and dedicated. Rick was the perfect American, a crass New Yorker placing his business over his ethics. Ilsa was the perfect drama queen. The best part of the film is when she tries to conceal the deep love she holds for her husband during her attempt to convince Rick into providing Victor with the papers to leave the country. She loves her husband so much that she is willing to stay behind in Casablanca with Rick and sacrifice her own happiness for Victor's safety. It's also a demonstration of an undying commitment to the "cause".

Casablanca is a great film.