

# Movie critique of "on the waterfront" assignment

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On the Waterfront I. Background/ History: On the Waterfront is a classic, award-winning, controversial film directed by Elia Kazan. This movie is part drama and part gangster film. The film is full of the problems of trade unions, corruption, and racketeering. It is set on New York's waterfront docks, where the workers try to keep their low wage jobs, while being bossed around by the mob. To make matters worse, the mob is in charge of the labor unions. The movie has a very realistic feel, due to where they shot the film. It was shot in Hoboken, New Jersey, at the actual loading docks.

They filmed inside the ships, in the bars, and on the rooftops of actual buildings. Abe Simon as Barney, Tony Galento as Truck, and Tami Mauriello as Tullio were real-life, professional ex-heavyweight boxers, and played as the bodyguards to the mob leaders. The movie did not bring in as much money as hoped, and it received harsh reviews. What it did was deliver a much needed message about the society on the waterfront. The story was based on a New York Sun newspaper reporter Malcolm Johnson's series of 24 articles called Crime on the Waterfront. The series was written about real events, and labor racketeering in New York's dockyards.

It also won the 1949 Pulitzer Prize for Local Reporting. II. Professional Critique Roger Ebert's critique was positive and he added some background information that was helpful to viewers. In the film, when a union boss shouts, " You ratted on us, Terry," the Brando character shouts back: " I'm standing over here now. I was rattin' on myself all those years. I didn't even know it. " This part in the film was about Kazan's view on communism, which he had liked. During the time the film was being made he had begun to oppose communism and this was his stab at it.

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Brando's line was repeated in Kazan's autobiography *A Life*, which was made in 1988. Ebert writes, " He writes of his feelings after the film won eight Oscars, including best picture, actor, actress and director: ' I was tasting vengeance that night and enjoying it. `On the Waterfront' is my own story; every day I worked on that film, I was telling the world where I stood and my critics to go and - - - themselves. ' In that statement you can feel the passion that was ignited by the HUAC hearings and the defiance of those who named names, or refused to. " (Ebert, March 21, 1999).

This makes it hard for some viewers to look past the film. One critic, Jonathan Rosenbaum, said that he could " never forgive" Kazan for using the film to try to justify himself to the public. Ebert brings up the point that directors' motives for movies are all different, at least Kazan told people why he made the movie and what he was trying to say in the film. The movie was very powerful and increased Brando's influence on change, and acting during the 1950's in America. Ebert also said, " And look at the famous scene between Terry and his brother, Charley (Rod Steiger), in the back seat of a taxi.

This is the " I coulda been a contender" scene, and it has been parodied endlessly (most memorably by Robert De Niro in " Raging Bull"). But it still has its power to make us feel Terry's pain, and even the pain of Charley, who has been forced to pull a gun on his brother. " (Ebert, 1999). III. James Berardinelli In his movie critique, he states many times that the best part of the movie is Martin Brando. He was born to play this role, even though he had turned it down before learning that Frank Sinatra had agreed to replace him.

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He is torn between his conscience, which is shaken after he realizes that he had a hand in the death of one of his friends, and his loyalty to his brother, who is the mob's right hand man. Brando is in this struggle for most of the movie. " Over the years, many critics have praised *On the Waterfront* for having what has been called a nearly perfect screenplay. Written by Budd Schulberg (based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning series of articles by Malcolm Johnson that originally appeared in *The New York Sun*), the script has the unmistakable ring of truth (despite the altered, upbeat ending).

For the most part, it neither proselytizes nor preaches, and deals with its central subject with a candor that many movies of the era lacked. "

(Beradinelli, reelviews. com). He also says that Kazan was trying to show how the unions were run during that time period. Beradinelli states that America was built on the back of the working class, and that unions greatly affected the working conditions of those workers. It was the changing of an era, one that was run by the workers instead of the owners of the business.

This movie shows how much power the workers held and how they should stand up for their rights if those rights were being mistreated. " I suspect that, had *On the Waterfront* been made two decades later, the ending would have been darker and more cynical than the one we are presented with.

(Indeed, the real-life situation upon which Schulberg based the screenplay did not end in such an upbeat fashion. ) Here, right prevails over wrong as the bloody-yet-unbowed Terry struggles to his feet and completes the quest for redemption that he began when he realized he had been used to lure a man to his death. (Beradinelli). IV. J. Hoberman " Always on the verge of unshed tears, his face a smooth mask of tragedy, Brando's Terry is as  
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soulfully stupid as he is beautiful??? a male Marilyn Monroe (who achieved sex deity status in 1954). No other actor ever made more poignant use of what, pace John Steinbeck, might be called the Lenny factor. Terry is a sort of brute yet vulnerable animal trembling on the brink of consciousness. " (J. Hoberman, Oct 26, 2004). Hoberman writes that this movie is one of the classics, and that Brando gives a performance of a lifetime.

He thinks very highly of this film. Hoberman also states that this was the first movie that Kazan made after he testified against the communist party.

Kazan put the scene where Brando is testifying against his brother's boss and essentially against his brother as well. He adds this part in there to let everyone see what a struggle it was for him to testify, and maybe people would understand why he did it. Kazan had asked Brando to play Terry, but he turned it down. Kazan was also looking at John Cassavetes, who played a Brando clone in *Edge of the City*.

Frank Sinatra was also considered for the part, and would have made him into even a bigger star. The actor John Garfield was who the film was wrote for, but he passed away before the movie was made. " At the same time, however, *On the Waterfront* is deeply evocative of Kazan's aesthetic heritage??? which is to say the left-wing theater of the 1930s. The look is less faux neo-realism than the bittersweet naturalism of the *Workers' Film and Photo League*. " (Hoberman). V. Personal Critique The film *On the Waterfront* was a good movie in my opinion.

I am a big Marlon Brandon fan and thought that he was the perfect actor to play Terry. I had never seen the movie before watching it in class, and

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caught many lines that I have heard people quote in other movies in this film. For example, the famous line by Brando in the taxi, " I coulda had class...I coulda been a contenda. " I have heard that line countless times and I finally got to see why it is so famous. I also liked to supporting cast. The priest was a big part of the film and I always like how people that are even in a corrupt group such as the mob respect the church. The main actress in the movie was great also.

She never gave up on Terry and stuck with trying to find out about her brother's death even though she knew it would get her into trouble with people that she knew were dangerous. After watching more intense mob movies, I was not impressed with the way the mob was portrayed. They seemed weak and like they were losing their grip on the docks, which is what the director wanted. But since I find the mob interesting, I did not like how the mob boss was paranoid all the time. After learning more about the background of the director and the making of the film, more things made sense to me.

The courtroom scene was an important part in the movie because it showed how Terry decided to show up and testify against his family and friends. This also was put in by the director to show why he testified against the communist party and how difficult the decision must have been. This also took courage, to stand in front of people that he knew and do the right thing. I also found it interesting that the movie was taking from actual newspaper articles. This added to the story's realism and gave it more of a solid background. I thought that this was a good movie because of the acting, the setting, and what the movie stood for.

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