

Night and the City: When Free Expression Becomes Anti-American Sentiment

Jules Dassin's movie *Night and the City* was, along with others of his era, subjected to criticism as part of the Red Scare campaign of the 1950s in the United States. Yet, to label Dassin's work as anti-American is to overlook both its message and its director's constitutional right to free speech. In refuting these charges of anti-Americanism, one must regard Dassin's film in the context of the post-World War II sentiment and prevailing politics of his day. To this end, *Night and the City* is not anti-American, but rather an artistic expression that was judged too harshly by a frightened few who were obsessed with the evils and threat of Communism.

One counter-argument, however, may claim that depicting Americans in a negative light is, de facto, anti-American behavior and therefore subject to censorship. Such an argument may be based on the notion that Americans are gullible and naive and that Harry Fabian, the film's antagonist, is portrayed as an American thug. While it is true that the star of *Night and the City* is a character of ill-repute — a thug and a despicable human being — in no way does he represent Americans as a whole. If motion pictures were censored every time Americans were shown to be negative characters, then even classics such as *Gone With The Wind*, *It's a Wonderful Life* and *Casablanca* would be on the out list.

The most basic problem with identifying a work of art as "anti-American" is that the term is not clearly defined. If it is best defined as portraying Americans in a negative light or criticizing our capitalistic society, then that poses a fundamental conflict between opinion and constitutional rights.

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Comment: Italicize titles of films

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Comment: Sentence is long-winded. Consider: "...along with other American films of the 1950s, subjected to criticism as part of the Red Scare campaign..."

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Comment: The way this sentence is phrased assumes that the reader believes Dassin's work to be anti-American. Consider: "Yet, in their labeling Dassin's work as anti-American, critics overlooked..."

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