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'Hollywood's Changing Takes on Terrorism: Re-viewing John Huston's *We Were Strangers* (1949)'

Something began to go wrong with the stars of nations in 1925. Tyranny and brutality were making their debut in the world – again. Among the first casualties was the lovely island of Cuba. A clique of corrupt politicians led by President Machado drove all liberty from its tropic shores. They throttled its press, gagged its voice, hanged its soul, paralyzed its honour, and reduced its people to beggary and despair. With gibbet and gun they made a mockery of human rights and looted its industries and plantations. This is the story of the White Terror under which the island of Cuba cowered for seven years until its freedom-loving heart found its heroes – in 1933.

'Resistance to tyrants is obedience to God' - - (Thomas Jefferson)

Scholarly analyses of Hollywood's depiction of terrorism have grown increasingly diverse and innovative over the past decade. Inspired in part by claims that al-Qaeda's attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001 looked 'just like a movie', experts in communications, film and political science have explored everything from the cinematic mind-set of modern-day jihadists to the ability of 'creature-features' to inspire patriotic 'actor-vism' in today's increasingly interactive media environment. The overall result is on the one hand a more sophisticated understanding of the American film industry's role in the US-led Global War on Terror and, on the other, a deepening of the long-running debate over the relationship between mass media and political violence.¹

This article seeks to add an important historical dimension to the subject of Hollywood's treatment of terrorism.² In the process, it aims to historicise and contextualise the media's relationship to today's Global Age of Terror by looking at the evolution of American cinema's classification of terrorism and by examining the political, cultural and industrial dynamics of one particular film made nearly seventy years ago.³ Recently, scholars have started to mine the extraordinarily fertile history of cinematic terrorism, taking us back to the likes of Alfred Hitchcock's British-made 1936 melodrama *Sabotage* and Italian Gillo Pontecorvo's classic 1966 docudrama *The Battle of Algiers*.⁴ Some, less aged American movies about terrorism have also come under the spotlight, especially those from the 1990s whose plots bore an uncanny resemblance to those events witnessed on 9/11.⁵ Aside from these and other 'Bad Arab' features dating from the 1970s,⁶ however, we know little about Hollywood's, in truth, very long and complex relationship with terrorism. This lacuna needs filling, for a variety of reasons. Documenting how the world's most powerful film industry has depicted political violence over the past century can help us to, among other things, identify important trends in the way cinema has defined terrorism, uncover the range of commercial, cultural and ideological factors that have influenced filmic output relating to terrorism, and consider cinema's long-term impact on public attitudes towards political violence.

John Huston's *We Were Strangers*, a black-and-white thriller set in 1930s Cuba and released in 1949, is an excellent illustration of the multifaceted history of Hollywood terrorism. Though it is now largely forgotten, *We Were Strangers* offers the scholar much food for thought. Here is a film that, for one thing, dates back to Hollywood's Golden Age and consequently long before the conventional starting point for accounts of American cinematic terrorism, the 1970s. Secondly, the film focuses on

not one but two, competing forms of terrorism and not in the Middle East or Asia - the chief locus of US terrorism films more recently - but in America's backyard. Third, *We Were Strangers* engages explicitly with the revolutionary dynamics of Cuba before Fidel Castro came to power on the island in the late 1950s and consequently fuses the subject of terrorism with both the politics of the early Cold War and American media representations of Latin America. Finally, *We Were Strangers* depicts terrorists as freedom fighters almost two decades before *The Battle of Algiers* famously dared to do this and, moreover, did so paradoxically during one of the most reactionary periods in Hollywood's history, the post-Second World War Red Scare. Where did this film noir about terrorism come from? Why and how was such a challenging movie made? What was the Oscar-winning scriptwriter/director John Huston seeking to achieve with it? How did *We Were Strangers* fare at the box office and what was the political reaction to it both in the United States and elsewhere?

Using a range of primary sources, this article examines the origins, production and reception of *We Were Strangers*. In so doing, it provides answers to all of the questions above and sheds fresh light on a neglected movie made by one of Hollywood's most revered filmmakers. Going beyond this, by contextualising *We Were Strangers* historically, the article shows that Huston's film should be seen as part of a pattern in which Hollywood's definition of and approach towards the subject of terrorism has changed significantly across eras. By detailing the production of *We Were Strangers*, the article gives us an insight into the obstacles that American filmmakers have typically met when touching on the subject of terrorism – obstacles that, in the case of *We Were Strangers*, helped hobble the film aesthetically and politically. Finally, by analysing the reaction to *We Were Strangers*, the article points to the risks in jumping to conclusions

about the impact that screen images of terrorism have had – or might now have - on critical and public opinion.

We Were Strangers was by no means the first American film to be made that in one way or another focused on the subject of terrorism. In fact, terrorism on the American screen predates the birth of Hollywood in the 1910s and is almost as old as cinema itself. In the decade or so before the First World War, American filmmakers, together with their British, French and Danish counterparts, led the field in exploiting the fear of violent anarchism and nationalism that gripped political elites across the industrialised world. At this stage of its development, the terrorism film was far from being a recognisable genre but the perceived threat of revolutionary terrorism appears to have played an integral role in the evolution of other genres, especially crime dramas and ‘chase’ films. Though screen terrorists during cinema’s formative phase differed significantly from many of those we have come across more recently – they were rarely labelled ‘terrorists’, for one thing – there are a number of notable similarities.

The First Age of Terror, which began in the late nineteenth century and culminated in the assassination of the Habsburg Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in June 1914, inspired numerous silent American shorts. Early, extant examples include *Execution of Czolgosz, with Panorama of Auburn Prison*, a four-minute-long piece shot in late 1901 by the acclaimed movie pioneer Edwin S. Porter. Porter’s film gruesomely re-enacted the electrocution of anarchist Leon Czolgosz, who months earlier had assassinated US President William McKinley. The seamless blending of fact and fiction in *Execution of Czolgosz* – complete with the assassin’s double looking straight into the audience’s eyes as his body spasms violently – made the film look highly realistic, and

not only sent out a clear message to any would-be terrorists but from a technical point of view anticipated many terrorism films to come.⁷

By the 1910s, a number of American filmmakers had graduated to fifteen-minute melodramas centred on the dastardly antics of foreign-born anarchists who were intent on creating mayhem in the nation's major cities. Typical of this sub-genre was *The Voice of the Violin*, made in 1909 by the 'father of film', D.W. Griffith. The story of an impoverished, love-struck German music teacher in New York City who is sent on a bombing mission by a rag-tail bunch of anarchists-cum-socialists, *The Voice of the Violin* was chiefly designed to make money rather than to score political points. The same can be said for the vast majority of all American films about terrorism, then and since. At the same time, *The Voice of the Violin's* condemnation of terrorism was crystal clear in terms of characterisation and plot. Crackpot extremists in hooded black cloaks spout utopian slogans; well-meaning intellectuals are brainwashed into violent activities; the villain eventually sees the light and turns hero in a nail-biting, bomb-defusing finale; and cross-class love ultimately trumps political radicalism.⁸

Contrasting with films like *The Voice of the Violin* were other American melodramas from the same era that actually sympathised with terrorists operating outside the United States. This was particularly the case with films set in unreconstructed European autocracies. The bravery of Russian revolutionaries violently challenging Tsarist repression, for instance, was dramatized in ten-minute one-reelers like Wallace McCutcheon's *The Nihilists* (1905), in which an aristocrat's daughter assassinates a royal governor with a bomb following her father's fatal deportation to Siberia. In James Young's *My Official Wife* (1914), one of the early stars of the US screen, Clara Kimball Young, played the leader of a group of revolutionaries plotting to kill the

Tsar himself.⁹ As well as being escapist, action-filled fun, much of this material could be highly chauvinistic. Many movies focused on the insurrectionists' ultimate desire to live in the United States, the so-called Land of Liberty. Carrying a rather different message, some productions equated Russia's nihilists with the leaders of the American Revolution.¹⁰

In the aftermath of the First World War, American filmmakers on the whole took a far more jaundiced view of violent revolutionaries everywhere. By this stage, the US film industry had become more centralised in Los Angeles and, owing to greater Wall Street investments and tighter censorship regulations, more socially and politically conservative. In line with this, and in response to real-life political upheaval in Russia in 1917, terrorism on the US screen effectively became synonymous with Bolshevism. This shift in approach was particularly pronounced during the 1918-1921 Red Scare. Fred Niblo's lurid melodrama *Dangerous Hours* (1920), for example, used the story of a New York shipyard strike to present the newly formed Communist Party of the United States as a front for terrorism, extortion and rape. George Zimmer's government-sponsored documentary *Starvation*, also from 1920, manipulated images of post-revolutionary Russia to show that Bolshevism amounted to, as the film's chief financier put it, 'an after-the-war terror' that threatened to carry a deadly disease across Europe. D.W. Griffith's French Revolutionary epic *Orphans of the Storm* (1921) drew clear, ugly comparisons between Jacobin terrorism of the 1790s and events in modern-day Russia.¹¹

By the time talking pictures arrived in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the perceived threat to the American 'way of life' from a worldwide Communist revolution had subsided somewhat. This, in turn, produced another change in filmmakers'

definition of terrorism, and one that reflected the unease caused by an increasing number of 'fascist-like' attacks on immigrants and African-Americans in a country rocked by the Great Depression. Archie Mayo's *Black Legion* (1937) was the most controversial of these films, a 'fact-based' Warner Bros. drama that starred Humphrey Bogart as a brutally racist mid-western factory worker who is a member of a clandestine organisation which is conducting 'reigns of terror' against 'foreigners'. *Black Legion* attracted praise and scorn in equal measure. Some on the political left called it a brave exposé of a dark social phenomenon in the United States. What many historians call America's oldest terrorist organisation, the white supremacist group the Ku Klux Klan, sued Warner Bros. for libel.¹²

Within a few years of categorising terrorism as right-wing extremism, Hollywood had shifted once again. During the Second World War, many films produced by the Grand Alliance partners championed the rights of European anti-Nazi resistance groups to use terrorist methods. While Hollywood movies depicted resistance violence far less graphically than their Soviet counterparts, many of them still took pleasure in depicting the mass killing of soldiers and collaborators, and thereby showing that the boundaries between war, terrorism and resistance could often be exceedingly hazy. Thus, Fritz Lang's *Hangmen Also Die!* (1943) portrayed the Czech assassins of the notorious Nazi official Reinhard Heydrich as underground heroes. Louis King's *Chetniks! The Fighting Guerrillas* (1943) celebrated hostage-takings, assassinations, sabotage and bombings in the name of Serbian patriotism and religious freedom. And Lewis Milestone's *The North Star* (1943) portrayed Ukrainian doctors wrestling with their consciences before shooting dead their cruel German counterparts.¹³

It should be clear by this stage that 'terrorism' proved to be a highly malleable term during the first fifty years of American cinema. Filmmakers chose a variety of locations, at home and overseas, in which to depict terrorist activities. Most of the time their movies demonised terrorism, but on some occasions they defended or even, in wartime, campaigned in favour of it. Few movies explored the rights and wrongs of terrorism in any great depth, and even fewer focused on terrorism's impact on ordinary civilians. Most, instead, followed the political consensus, and used political violence as a prop for exciting action scenes or for one-dimensional, easily comprehensible stories about good versus evil. A pattern had been set, in other words, one which, it could be argued, has altered relatively little ever since.

John Huston's *We Were Strangers*, released in 1949, does not represent a complete departure from this pattern. In many ways, Huston's film blends the 'resistance-terrorism' theme of the war years with those older movies of the pre-First World War era that depicted Russian nihilists as would-be democrats. As we shall see, however, *We Were Strangers* does mark a subtle change in terms of the questions it asked about the causes and morality of terrorism. Had Huston got his way, the film might also have set a precedent in terms of the depiction of violence used by terrorists against civilians. In order to establish just what Huston sought to say about terrorism and other things in *We Were Strangers*, and how, let us start with the film's origins.

We Were Strangers was adapted from *Rough Sketch*, an episodic novel written by the American Robert Sylvester and published by the Dial Press in 1948. Sylvester had been a press agent for the comedian Bob Hope before becoming a drama reporter and feature writer for the *New York Daily News* in the mid-1930s. Sylvester was not a political animal; his piece in *Rough Sketch* set around the famous coup that had ousted

the despotic President Gerardo Machado y Morales of Cuba in 1933, titled 'China Valdez', was penned for profit not propaganda. Reviewers saw 'China Valdez' as more than a piece of dramatic fluff, however; indeed, one, perhaps encouraged by Sylvester, called it 'perfect material for a [John] Huston picture'. Huston agreed and so bought the rights.¹⁴

John Huston was the most famous liberal writer-director in Hollywood in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Having been an anti-fascist activist in the 1930s, in 1947 Huston helped form the Committee for the First Amendment to counter the Hollywood anti-communist witch-hunt led by the Congressional House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). He also became the political manager in southern California of Henry Wallace's Progressive campaign for the US presidency in 1948. Huston had already collaborated on one film that celebrated democratic revolutionaries in the Western Hemisphere, *Juarez* (1939), so it is easy to see why 'China Valdez' appealed to his political sensibilities. A movie made in and about Cuba also made sense commercially and artistically. The small island ranked among Hollywood's top ten most important export markets and there was a steady demand for Cuban-set films in the United States. In early 1949, Huston would win two Academy Awards with *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, a western made on location in Mexico and set in the aftermath of that country's revolution in the 1920s. *We Were Strangers* offered the prospect of repeating this success and was another opportunity to cut costs by using cheap local labour.¹⁵

Had Huston tried to make *We Were Strangers* with one of Hollywood's major studios, it is unlikely the film would have got off the ground. Studio moguls were sceptical of politically challenging scripts at the best of times but during the Great Fear

that spread through Hollywood during the post-Second World War Red Scare such material could land filmmakers in all sorts of trouble.¹⁶ In the event, *We Were Strangers* was made by Horizon Pictures, an independent company recently set up by Huston and the maverick producer Sam Spiegel, who the Hollywood establishment then regarded as a fly-by-night upstart but would go on to win Academy Awards for *On the Waterfront* (1954), *Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957) and *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962). Spiegel persuaded Columbia Pictures to co-finance the project, his pitch at MGM having failed owing to the concerns mogul Louis B. Mayer had with *We Were Strangers'* bomb plot theme. During the latter stages of production, Mayer's son-in-law, the legendary independent producer David Selznick, effectively tried to take control of *We Were Strangers* – with, as we shall see, mixed results.¹⁷

The difficult, if colourful process of scripting *We Were Strangers* began in the spring of 1948. Before we look at this, however, it is important to outline the complex dynamics of Cuba's real-life coup of 1933 - widely seen, then and since, as a seminal event in the island's history - within the wider framework of Cuban-US relations. Cuba gained independence from Spain with the help of the Americans in 1902. The republic was then effectively incorporated within the United States' expanding informal empire. In 1925, Liberal Party leader Gerardo Machado became Cuba's fifth president. Publically determined, among other things, to abrogate the 1901 Platt Amendment through which Washington controlled Cuba's trade and foreign policy, Machado soon gained a reputation not as a champion for Cuban freedom but as a murderous, pro-American dictator. His campaign of 'White Terror' provoked demonstrations, general strikes, bombings and assassinations. In August 1933, Machado lost his struggle against the

insurgents when he fled to the Bahamas. US diplomats secretly played a critical role in engineering Machado's ouster in order to prevent American investments on the island from falling into the hands of the president's radical opposition. When a revolutionary, anti-American government did then briefly take charge in Havana, Washington helped manoeuvre into power an alternative, more 'moderate' regime. This was led by, among others, Fulgencio Batista, whom Fidel Castro would famously overthrow in 1959.¹⁸

Robert Sylvester's short story about Cuba in *Rough Sketch*, 'China Valdez', was fashioned around the most notorious attempt to assassinate Gerardo Machado before the 1933 coup. In September 1932, the ABC Revolutionary Society had murdered the president of the Cuban senate, Clemente Vazquez Bello, and dug a long tunnel to his funeral site with the intention of killing the entire Machado government with a huge, underground bomb. At the last moment, the funeral was switched to a different location, whereupon the police uncovered the bomb plot and the revolutionaries were all executed. 'China Valdez' is the study of an opportunist, Tony Fenner, a Cuban-American who is plotting revolution for all he can get, and who is a complete cynic about wealthy exiles who promote Latin-American revolts from safe distances and only move onto the scene as heroes once the real dirty work has been accomplished. Sylvester's story sees Fenner strike up a relationship with a fellow revolutionary, a young Havana woman called China Valdez. The novella concludes with the failure of the tunnel plot and with Fenner evading a police firing squad by fleeing to Miami.¹⁹

Huston hired Peter Viertel to help him adapt 'China Valdez' for the screen. Viertel had his own experience of 'resistance-terrorism', having recently worked with the US's Office of Strategic Services in Nazi-occupied Europe; just before that he had co-scripted Alfred Hitchcock's *Saboteur* (1942). Writing decades later, Viertel commented on the

radical nature of *We Were Strangers*' subject matter. '[E]ven in those days, long before international terrorism reached its alarming proportions, making a group of political assassins the heroes was a daring departure from the norm for adventure stories.'²⁰ Viertel, a future blacklistee, seems personally not to have worried about this aspect of the film, but others did. When trying to sell the movie to the politically conservative Louis B. Mayer, Sam Spiegel sought to calm the mogul's nerves by telling him that the story would end with the American Navy as the real heroes of the story. In the final scene, a US Navy warship would sail into Havana harbour, rescue the imprisoned revolutionaries and dispose of the dictator. This turned out not to be the case, though *We Were Strangers* certainly did paint the United States in a more positive light than had Sylvester's novella.²¹

Another person of note who expressed concern about *We Were Strangers*' potentially cavalier attitude towards terrorism was the novelist Ernest Hemingway. Viertel and Huston spent a fortnight in Cuba in May 1948, mainly to scout locations but also to consult with Hemingway, who was a friend of Viertel's, on the intrigues of Cuban politics. Hemingway was then Cuba's most famous 'norteamericano', having bought a house on the island since in the late 1930s. The author believed it would be a great mistake to glorify those who had killed Vazquez Bello as 'bait' back in 1932 because the senate president had been a genuine liberal and a 'good man'. Hemingway said he approved to some degree with political assassinations, as they were a way of stopping people using power simply to get rich, but argued that Vazquez Bello's murder was a prime example of how revolutionaries' means pervert their ends. 'Terrorists were in the vanguard of almost every revolution,' Hemingway concluded, 'but ultimately they had to be eliminated.' Huston and Viertel found Hemingway's comments 'disturbing'.²²

As Viertel and Huston toured Cuba in a chauffeur-driven limousine, and consulted historians about the 1933 coup, they were left in little doubt about the volatility of Cuban politics and about how *We Were Strangers* might easily add to present-day tensions despite depicting events that were more than a decade old. Locals who were asked to provide insight into the Machado regime were often too frightened to discuss politics, though the president of Havana University, where a number of prominent 'oppositionistas' had been based, did grant the filmmakers his full cooperation. The walls of the hotel where Viertel and Huston were staying, the prestigious Nacional, were pock-marked with shell-holes from the most recent attempt to overthrow the Cuban government. Huston needed the permission of both the US State Department and the current Cuban government to shoot his exteriors in Havana. The political party that identified itself with the revolution celebrated in *We Were Strangers*, the Revolutionary Cuban Party - Authentico, was then in power. It was quite happy to lend Huston some practical assistance and sought to use the movie as propaganda to bolster its position.²³

When filming began on *We Were Strangers* in August 1948, the script was far from complete. Part of the reason for this was heavy-handed interference from David O. Selznick. For many years, the powerful, arrogant producer of the 1939 blockbuster *Gone with the Wind* had made a habit of trying to exercise control over movies he had no contractual right to. Selznick's dubious claim to 'advise' on *We Were Strangers* largely rested on his having loaned Horizon Pictures one of his most valuable contracted artists, Jennifer Jones, who, scandalously, was also his mistress. Selznick deluged Spiegel, Huston and Columbia Studios' chief Harry Cohn with memos about Jones' role as China Valdez and demanding that they treat the star with greater respect. Selznick would later

also work on retakes with Huston and Spiegel, and complain about everything from the movie's title, continuity and sound-matching to a Kimono costume which made Jones look like 'a two dollar prostitute'.²⁴

As an ardent Republican, Selznick would have been fully aware of the damage that playing a left-wing terrorist might cause Jones' career, especially with HUAC in town. This might help explain why, in the final cut of the *We Were Strangers*, China (pronounced Cheena) only joins the rebel group after seeing the police murder her brother, whereas in early scripts she is a committed radical from the outset. Those same scripts also put much greater emphasis than the final cut on the role that economic and class divisions within society can play in driving people to political violence by, for instance, showing the poverty in which China's family live. The early scripts also, finally, included negative comments from one or two characters about the overbearing economic and cultural influence the US had in Cuba – none of which appeared in the film itself.²⁵ These comments were presumably the work of Huston, who years later expressed disgust at the corruption he found in Cuba while working on *We Were Strangers*, at with how little the US government had done to help ordinary Cubans before Fidel Castro came to power, and at the way American industrialists and plantation owners had exploited the island over such a long period.²⁶

Selznick's meddling aside, the principle difficulty the scriptwriters had was in deciding how to come up with a suitable ending for *We Were Strangers*. On the one hand, if they stuck to the facts and finished with the bomb plotters failing and being executed, they reckoned the audience would be left with a bitter taste in its mouth and the movie would probably fail commercially. On the other hand, if they rewrote history in favour of entertainment and showed the plotters slaughtering Machado's gang,

America's notoriously conservative film censors, the Production Code Administration, would at the very least demand severe cuts.²⁷ Some evidence suggests that Huston would have liked, for political and commercial reasons, to have taken a risk and done such a rewrite, but that he compromised by inserting controversial dialogue into the movie at a late stage that would get people to think about whether it was sometimes justifiable for terrorists to kill civilians.²⁸

Even after most of the filming of *We Were Strangers* had been completed, Huston and Spiegel were still puzzling over how to draw the movie to a suitable close. They therefore consulted the experienced directors William Wyler, co-founder of the Committee for the First Amendment, and Billy Wilder about how they themselves would end the movie, but neither could come up with a solution. Eventually, Spiegel recruited one of the most prolific screenwriters in the business, Ben Hecht, at Hecht's favourite rate of \$1000-a-day. Hecht was no stranger himself to terrorism, having recently lent active support to the Jewish paramilitaries in Palestine that had fought for the creation of Israel. Hecht duly came up with a politically and artistically acceptable denouement for *We Were Strangers*, an upbeat one which saw China and Tony Fenner battling with the police in a shoot-out after the bomb plot has been thwarted. The long, violent gunfight helps to inspire revolution in Havana. Tony is fatally shot but dies happily because he is in the arms of China and hears that Cuba's despotic president has fled the country.²⁹

Writing in 1987, the film scholar Robert Sklar categorised *We Were Strangers* as an early example of a genre that during the 1980s became increasingly prevalent in Hollywood's response to Third World liberation struggles – the movie that abhors

tyrants but is decidedly ambivalent towards movements that oppose them and is more interested in the tragic fate of Americans who get in the way. Sklar had in mind the likes of Constantin Costa-Gavras' *Missing* (1982), Roger Spottiswoode's *Under Fire* (1983) and Oliver Stone's *Salvador* (1987), all of which were set more or less in present-day Latin America and all of which, especially *Missing*, generated intense political debate during a period when many in the US government and media **believed that the Soviet Union was secretly using terrorists as a proxy force against the West, including in Latin America.**³⁰

Sklar was in many ways right about *We Were Strangers*. China Valdez (Jones) is certainly the movie's chief protagonist and as a consequence the audience is invited to look at Cuban politics through Cuban eyes. But the unmistakable hero of *We Were Strangers* is Tony Fenner, a man who looks and sounds American (despite his Cuban roots) and who not only funds and leads the fight for freedom but is the only one to die for it. Tony was played by John Garfield, one of Hollywood's leading actors of the 1940s (and, like Huston, a prominent leftist). Unlike his fellow rebels, Tony has no Spanish accent, mainly because he was brought up in New York. He is also more measured and rational (i.e. more 'American') than his hot-headed Latin comrades, who spend their time either singing calypsos about their revolutionary activities or suffering mental breakdowns. There is only one other American character in the movie, an equally well-balanced and politically sympathetic bank manager, who is China's boss. Tony is always democratic – always asking for his comrades' views – and remains cool to the very end, even with his white suit covered in blood.

Yet it is Tony's very Americanness that helps make *We Were Strangers* so interesting, especially from the point of view of cinematic terrorism. For, unlike the

American protagonists in *Missing*, *Under Fire* and *Salvador*, Tony Fenner is not a journalist; he is, as Columbia's publicity department and many critics called him,³¹ a terrorist. Moreover, in contrast with those anti-Nazi resistance-terrorists celebrated only a few years earlier in movies such as Lang's *Hangmen Also Die!*, Tony's rebels cannot justify their violence based on the fact that they are ridding their country of foreign occupiers; Cuba might be in turmoil under Machado's dictatorship but it is not technically or legally 'at war'. Tony himself wields a gun, orders assassinations and plans massacres. He is not bloodthirsty but acts with an assuredness that violence directed against those in authority is sometimes necessary. Moreover, Tony is supported in his actions – as the movie's epigraph tells us - by none other than one of America's founding fathers, Thomas Jefferson.

Of course, *We Were Strangers* tells us that Tony's gang doesn't have a choice but to use violence. The movie makes it abundantly clear that by far the worse form of terrorism being carried out in Cuba is that by the state. Machado's White Terror means that a whole country is effectively being held hostage. At the outset of the movie, we see that the Cuban senate is a democratic joke and merely rubber-stamps all the dictator's wishes. People are arrested simply for reading the rebels' 'Viva Cuba Libre!' leaflets; anyone caught distributing such 'propaganda' is shot on the spot. China's brother Manolo (Tito Renaldo), a mild-mannered student, is gunned down with impunity in broad daylight by the secret police (or 'Porra'). Typifying film noir, many scenes are shot at night or in poorly-lit rooms, thereby accentuating Havana's oppression. The long tunnel dig, which sees the rebels unearthing cemetery bodies, adds further to a sense of claustrophobia and fear.

We Were Strangers' requisite sinister villain is Ariete, played by the Mexican Pedro Armendariz. The head of the Porra, Ariete is a state terrorist par excellence. It is he who machine-guns Monolo on the university's monumental steps, runs a network of informers and uncovers the tunnel plot. Ariete bullies everyone, including the American bank manager, and is jealous of Americans for their wealth and for stealing 'his' Cuban women. Ariete is a fat, sexist pig who tries to rape China on one occasion, only to fall asleep drunk. He talks openly of the 'terrorists' whose bodies he has dumped in Havana Bay and does not have a single friend; he confesses to China that even his own mother cowers in his presence. Ariete gets his just desserts at the very end of the movie. In a frighteningly explicit scene ('sickening', some critics called it),³² we see him being strung up by the feet and set alight by the dancing citizens of Havana.

As shocking as this last scene is – one that shows the terror of the mob, French Revolution-style – it is Tony's willingness to kill civilians in the process of assassinating Ariete and Machado that was perhaps more alarming for audiences. It is certainly this aspect of the movie that makes *We Were Strangers* historically so bold. In a seminal scene twenty minutes into the movie, where the five 'strangers' first meet one another, Tony and his comrades discuss the morality of their bomb plot at length. Tony sets out his plan to his five cell members and tells them that, on top of the government ministers and police chiefs they are targeting, the underground bomb will lead to the death of anywhere between 20 and 100 innocent civilian mourners. This will include 'wives, children and servants'. Killing innocent people is 'a crime committed almost every day by the Porristas,' replies one of the conspirators, Miguel (Wally Cassell), 'but two wrongs do not make a right... Should we who are trying to free Cuba become murderers too?' The others counter Miguel either by telling of the loss of their own innocent loved-

ones at the hands of the regime or, more neutrally, almost intellectually, of their knowledge of the regime's profound abuses. Miguel soon comes round to the others' way of thinking and the cell agrees unanimously, democratically to go ahead with the operation.³³

It can be argued that this scene and the idea of killing such a large number of innocents are later neutered by the failure of the bomb plot to actually go ahead. As a result, there are no images of civilian deaths akin to that seen in earlier movies like Hitchcock's *Sabotage*, still less those of a more explicit nature shown in Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers*. In a powerful outdoor highway sequence, we do nonetheless see the freedom fighters violently gunning down the politically moderate senate head, Contreras, as bait for the bomb; Contreras is an old man, is generally popular in Cuba and looks harmless.³⁴ The terrorists also take the audience on a journey of hell through the tunnel dug from beneath China's house to the corpse-infested cemetery – the stench of death is almost palpable in these scenes. With the exception of Ramon (David Bond), a student driven insane by guilt at the impending murder of Contreras, who was once a family friend, the terrorists do not flinch in their determination to carry out the massacre. When the tunnel plot unravels, dockworker Guillermo (Gilbert Roland) even offers to carry out a suicide mission by driving a truck bomb into the presidential palace. The rebels' resolve makes their plan seem more logical and defensible rather than reckless and reprehensible. Terrorists can be heroes, in other words, even those who kill the innocent. It makes more sense to do something about the causes of political violence, the film suggests, rather than simply condemn all those who carry it out as immoral.

We Were Strangers, which was released in spring 1949, is by no means one of John Huston's best films. Huston had set the bar high in 1948 with *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* and *Key Largo*, and quickly returned to form in 1950 with the Academy Award-winning *The Asphalt Jungle*. The latter, a taut thriller about a group of men planning and executing a jewel robbery, was not dissimilar in shape and style to *We Were Strangers*. The important difference in dramatic terms, however, is that in *The Asphalt Jungle* the criminals actually get to carry out their plan whereas in *We Were Strangers* the Cuban revolutionaries do not. *We Were Strangers* in many ways falls apart as soon as Fenner's gang hears that their tunnelling has been a complete waste of time. The film's last twenty minutes are, as trade bible *Variety* put it, 'anti-climactic',³⁵ and the final shoot-out scene, though itself extremely violent (especially the images of China, with her crucifix prominent in close-ups, tommy-gunning the Porra), feels like an add-on. It is difficult not to believe that *We Were Strangers* would have been a much stronger film, commercially and politically, had the bomb gone off.

In and of itself, *We Were Strangers*' weak ending does not, though, fully explain the movie's arrant box-office failure. The film actually did very well as a first-run newcomer on Broadway in New York in April 1949, taking a handsome \$32,000 at the prestigious Astor Theatre. *We Were Strangers* then garnered positive reviews, in the US and elsewhere, especially for being so 'realistic' and for posing questions about terrorists' ends and means. '[I]t poses a tremendous universal question,' the British newspaper *News Chronicle* stated: 'Does the immense benefit to the majority that would probably result justify causing the deaths of a number of innocent persons?'³⁶ The American critic Vernon Young went so far as to call *We Were Strangers* 'the definitive "revolution" movie ... probably the best of its kind Hollywood has done', while the

doyenne of Hollywood columnists, Louella Parsons, described it as 'a distinct treat' and 'no movie for sissies'.³⁷ After this auspicious opening, however, *We Were Strangers* quickly ran into trouble. Presaging the fate of many future terrorism movies, parties with political axes to grind appropriated *We Were Strangers* for their own ends, the result being distortion, confusion and ultimately, for the filmmakers themselves, frustration.

For many conservatives in Hollywood in the early Cold War, John Huston was a marked man, a radical leftie giving succour to the enemy within. The same went for John Garfield, who in 1952 would die at the age of 39 of a heart attack brought on, many claim, by HUAC's investigations into his alleged communist sympathies.³⁸ In light of this, it is perhaps not surprising that the powerful trade paper *Hollywood Reporter*, which was run by Billy Wilkerson, one of the originators of the Hollywood blacklist, condemned *We Were Strangers* as communist filth. The movie was 'the heaviest dish of Red theory ever served to an audience outside the Soviet Union,' the paper claimed. 'The tactics of the rebels – their readiness to sacrifice innocent people for their purpose, makes for some horrifying moments'.³⁹ The powerful veterans association, the American Legion, then called (in vain) for *We Were Strangers* to be banned, while an influential Californian women's group charged the movie with recklessly encouraging revolution against governments that were friendly to the United States. 'This picture claims it is to perfectly all right to kill and destroy innocent people to get at the guilty,' the group's spokeswoman protested. 'Violence and rebellion,' she went on to say, 'are not in accord with the American way'.⁴⁰

Coming during a period of heightened fears about subversives and traitors in Hollywood, these attacks on *We Were Strangers* were undoubtedly damaging.

Columbia's Harry Cohn seems to have lost confidence in the movie and, according to some sources, took it out of circulation because ticket sales were so poor. As the Production Code Administration had predicted, *We Were Strangers* was also banned from entering a number of dictatorships, including Portugal and Egypt.⁴¹ The irony is that *We Were Strangers* was interpreted quite differently in other quarters. One New York magazine owned by the arch anti-communist William Randolph Hearst, *Sunday Mirror*, called the film 'a blueprint for those great masses of people living oppressed behind the Iron Curtain as to how they could rid their countries of their sinister tyrants' - a message the ever astute Sam Spiegel quickly endorsed.⁴² For their part, American communists denounced *We Were Strangers* for misrepresenting the 1933 Cuban revolution's goals, methods and accomplishments. *The Daily Worker* called for a film that focused on class struggle in Cuba, not the moral tensions of a tiny terrorist cell who 'indulge in discussions typical of college freshmen about the responsibility for the killing of innocents'.⁴³

Putting a brave face on things, Huston announced that he was 'delighted' to have been attacked by the political spectrum's 'lunatic ends', the *Hollywood Reporter* and *The Daily Worker*; 'it looks to me that like Stalin and Wall Street can get together, an encouraging manifestation'. Secretly, however, the director was hurt by all of these allegations of propaganda, and both he and Harry Cohn tried, rather pathetically, to dent Billy Wilkerson's income stream by temporarily withdrawing advertisements for their movies from the *Hollywood Reporter*.⁴⁴ Decades later, Huston would falsely claim that, in its espousal of outright rebellion in defence of freedom, *We Were Strangers* was intended all along to be a thinly veiled attack on the methods of those like Wilkerson and HUAC. Commentators have largely followed Huston's line ever since.⁴⁵

In Cuba itself, *We Were Strangers* seems to have done fairly good business, helped by being granted an extended two-week run at one of Havana's most luxurious cinema, the Teatro America. Here again though the reception of the film was politically mixed. A string of critics praised its 'passionate' and 'truthful' depiction of the revolution that had unseated Machado; one hoped that Cuban spectators would be flattered to see themselves positively rendered by such celebrated film artists as Huston, Garfield and Jones. In contrast, the communist newspaper *Hoy*, echoing *The Daily Worker*, argued that Garfield's character 'completely disfigure[d]' America's relationship with the Machado regime. The paper also felt that *We Were Strangers'* focus on one isolated 'terrorist' plot had failed to capture the 'national' and 'collective' nature of the anti-Machado 'movement'.⁴⁶

We Were Strangers soon disappeared from cinema screens worldwide, having made an overall loss of roughly \$500,000 on a \$1.5 million budget.⁴⁷ With that, the movie did not vanish altogether, however. It certainly seems to have had an after-life in parts of Europe. In 1959, to mark the centenary of the Second Italian War of Independence, an Italian body awarded Huston a prize for *We Were Strangers* on the theme of 'cinema and the people's struggle for liberty'.⁴⁸ This award may or may not have been related to Fidel Castro's dramatic ascent to power in Havana earlier that year, though at least one historian argues that *We Were Strangers* and a number of Hollywood films like it from the 1940s and 1950s might have helped inspire those who took part in the long guerrilla campaign that Castro led.⁴⁹

Cuba's rise to the top of the political agenda in the United States in the late 1950s and early 1960s seems to have caused renewed interest in *We Were Strangers*. As soon as Castro had emerged as Cuba's new, charismatic leader, David Selznick, who had

bought the film from Sam Spiegel in the early 1950s, made plans for reissuing *We Were Strangers* and striking a deal with US television networks.⁵⁰ Four years later, by which time American filmmaking in Cuba had effectively ground to a halt due to US trade sanctions and Washington's less than subtle efforts to topple Castro, *We Were Strangers* made the headlines, though not for reasons anyone could have predicted. In the aftermath of President John F. Kennedy's assassination in November 1963, Lee Harvey Oswald's widow Marina testified that her husband had watched *We Were Strangers* twice on television one weekend little more than a month before Kennedy was shot. No direct link between the movie and assassination was subsequently proven though investigations did confirm, among other things, that Oswald had been an activist for the pro-Castro campaign group Fair Play for Cuba Committee. *We Were Strangers* has since become a minor cog in the JFK conspiracy industry.⁵¹

In many ways, this article has shown that *We Were Strangers* tells us more about John Huston's life-long fondness for the poetry of failure and about the Hollywood Red Scare than anything else. But it has hopefully demonstrated that *We Were Strangers* also broke barriers when it came to Hollywood's depiction of terrorism. Huston's movie was not the first Hollywood production to portray terrorists positively; indeed, it could be said to have borrowed from pre-First World War films in linking contemporary paramilitaries with America's founding fathers. So far as we can tell, however, no American film before *We Were Strangers* had been so openly supportive of armed revolutionary terrorism, even if it meant the death of innocent people. Most American films about revolutions made up to this point had used those revolutions as a mere dramatic hook. *We Were Strangers* was on one level very much a romantic melodrama

but on another it was a stridently political movie about the justifiable killing of a president.

We Were Strangers might have broken taboos but it did not revolutionise Hollywood's treatment of the subject of terrorism. One reason why it did not do so is because the movie was a commercial flop, but its failure to inspire other filmmakers politically can also be attributed to the very different ways in which *We Were Strangers* was interpreted. The film was effectively hijacked by critics and activists who sought to turn it to their political and personal advantage, in some cases regardless of the movie's actual content. As a result, *We Were Strangers'* unusually direct treatment of terrorism to some extent got lost amid the feverish cultural politics of the Cold War. This can help to remind us of the importance of contextualising all films historically, not least those about terrorism given that term's shifting meaning. It should also encourage us to question those who argue that there is a linear connection between the cinema's portrayal of terrorism and the public's increased fear of it. *We Were Strangers'* glorification of Cuban terrorism might have scared some critics but there is no evidence that the movie frightened audiences.⁵²

Hollywood would continue to play around with the meaning and nature of terrorism long after *We Were Strangers* had faded from view. During the 1950s and 1960s, this largely took the form of movies that placed terrorism in the context of the Cold War nuclear arms race. In the 1970s and 1980s, these films generally gave way to others that told of the threat posed to the West by European 'gangster-terrorists' and Third World revolutionaries. The most notorious example of this in which Cubans played a prominent role was John Milius's *Red Dawn* (1984), about a Soviet-Cuban guerrilla invasion of the United States.⁵³ The end of the Cold War then brought an

emphasis on America's new, twin enemies - post-Soviet, nuclear armed nationalism on the one hand and Islamic terrorism on the other. Since September 2001, the latter's presence has become all-pervasive on America's big and small screens. It is clear that, in filmic terms, the road to today's Global Age of Terror has been long and winding.⁵⁴

In the meantime, American filmmaking has recently returned to Cuba after a half-century embargo. In 2014, the US Treasury and State Department and the Cuban government gave Iranian-American director Bob Yari official permission to shoot *Papa*, a biopic about Ernest Hemingway's final troubled few years in Cuba before the 1959 revolution forced him to leave. Given that *Papa's* script was scrutinised by both the US and Cuban governments, we should not be surprised by how little the first Hollywood feature to have been produced in Cuba since 1960 has to say explicitly about the political violence that characterised the Caribbean island in the 1950s. *Papa* is no *We Were Strangers*, in other words, though it does contain scenes of Castro's rebels fighting Batista's strongmen outside Havana's Government Palace. *Papa's* debut at the Festival of New Latin American Cinema in Havana in December 2015 was taken by many people as richly symbolic of the opening up between the United States and Cuba, following the renewal of diplomatic relations in December 2014. At the Havana premiere, US embassy officials said that they expected many more Hollywood productions to follow in *Papa's* footsteps.⁵⁵

¹ See, for instance, Winston Wheeler Dixon (ed.), *Film and Television after 9/11* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 2004); J. David Slocum (ed.), *Terrorism, Media, Liberation* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005); Brigitte L. Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism: The Central Role of the Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007); Stephen Prince, *Firestorm: American Film in the Age of Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Tom Pollard, *Hollywood's 9/11: Superheroes, Supervillains, and Super Disasters* (London: Paradigm, 2011); Emanuelle Wessels, "Where Were You When the Monster Hit?" Media Convergence, Branded Security Citizenship, and the Trans-Media Phenomenon of *Cloverfield*', *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 17, 1, 2011, 69-83; David Slocum, '9/11 Film and Media Scholarship', *Cinema Journal*, 51, 1, Fall 2011, 181-193.

² This article explores the various ways in which Hollywood has defined terrorism but it may be useful to set out here certain characteristics potentially relevant to a broad, politically neutral category of terrorist action. These include the deliberate deployment, or threat of deployment, of violent action against people or property; the production of anxiety and fear by this action; the pursuit of this action by individuals, sub-state groups, or states motivated by criminal, political or religious reasons including the desire to demonstrate their power; the intimidation, or impact on, individuals who are neither directly involved in the violent action nor the primary targets of the actors' motivation; and the often clandestine or semi-clandestine nature of the action and responsible actors. Taken from J. David Slocum, 'Introduction: The Recurrent Return to Algiers', in Slocum (ed.), *Terrorism, Media, Liberation* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 1. On the difficulty of defining terrorism, and its changed

meaning over the last 200 years, see Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Alex Schmid and Albert Jongman, *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories and Literature* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1988); Conor Gearty, *Terrorism* (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1996); Richard English, *Terrorism: How to Respond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

³ While the burgeoning field of Critical Terrorism Studies rightly emphasizes the need to explore the histories of the representation of political violence, and through the entertainment media as well as the news media, scholars often pay relatively little attention to putting the resultant words, sounds and images in full political, social, cultural, diplomatic and commercial context. This article tries to do just this via case-study analysis using archival material. Among the many valuable articles that the journal *Critical Studies on Terrorism* has recently carried on cinema and terrorism are Klaus Dodds, 'Screening Terror: Hollywood, the United States and the Construction of Danger', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 1, 2, 2008, 227-243; Pat Brereton and Eileen Culloty, 'Post-9/11 Counterterrorism in Popular Culture: The Spectacle and Reception of *The Bourne Ultimatum* and *24*', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 5, 3, 2012, 483-497; Nicole D. Ives-Allison, 'Visual Rehumanisation: Torture and Terror in *In the Name of the Father* and *Fifty Dead Men Walking*', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 7, 2, 2014, 205-222; Clelia Clini, 'International Terrorism? Indian Popular Cinema and the Politics of Terror', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 8, 3, 2015, 337-357.

⁴ Merritt Abrash, 'Hitchcock's Terrorists: Sources and Significance', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 39, 3, 2011, 165-173; 'Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers*, 40 Years On', *Interventions* special issue, 9, 3, 2007, 335-413.

⁵ Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard, 'Hollywood and the Spectacle of Terrorism', *New Political Science*, 28, 3, September 2006, 335-351; Helena Vanhala, *The Depiction of Terrorists in Hollywood Blockbuster Films, 1980-2001: An Analytical Study* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010).

⁶ Jack Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs* (New York: Olive Branch, 2009).

⁷ Richard Porton, *Film and the Anarchist Imagination* (London: Verso, 1999), 16-17; Charles Musser, *Before the Nickelodeon: Edwin S. Porter and the Edison Manufacturing Company* (Berkeley LA: University of California Press, 1991), 184-190.

⁸ Steven Higgins, 'The Voice of the Violin', in Paolo Cherchi Usai (ed.), *The Griffith Project, Vol. 2* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 49-50; *The Bioscope*, 11, 236, 20 April 1911, Review suppl. xv.

⁹ *Variety*, 17 July 1914, 17; *Moving Picture World*, 16 December 1916, 1347; Kevin Brownlow, *Behind the Mask of Innocence: Sex, Violence, Prejudice, Crime - Films of Social Conscience in the Silent Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 353-359.

¹⁰ Brownlow, *Behind the Mask*, 353-355, 358.

¹¹ *Motion Picture World*, 14 February 1920, 971, 1116; Brownlow, *Behind the Mask*, 445-448, 453-457; William M. Drew, 'D.W. Griffith's *Orphans of the Storm*: A Re-evaluation', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 18, 2, April 1990, 76-86.

¹² 'The Black Legion', *Motion Picture Herald*, 9 January 1937; "'Black Legion": Powerful Melodrama', *Hollywood Reporter*, 5 January 1937; 'Black Legion Study Guide', US Commission on Human Relations, Progressive Educational Association, in Black Legion Core File, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles (hereafter AMPAS).

¹³ T. M. P. Pryor, 'Chetniks! The Fighting Guerrillas', *New York Times*, 19 March 1943, 15; Jürgen Schebera, 'Hangmen Also Die! (1943): Hollywood's Brecht-Eisler Collaboration',

Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television, 18, 4, October 1998, 567-573; *Box Office*, 23 October 1943.

¹⁴ Huston cited in Gerald Pratley, *The Cinema of John Huston* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1976), 73.

¹⁵ Lary May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 232-236; Megan J. Feeny, 'Hollywood in Havana: Film Reception and Revolutionary Nationalism in Cuba before 1959', unpublished PhD, University of Minnesota, 2008, 18.

¹⁶ The literature on Hollywood's troubles during the post-Second World War Red Scare is vast. See, for instance, David Cate, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge under Truman and Eisenhower* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978); Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930-1960* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1979); Victor S. Navasky, *Naming Names* (New York: John Calder, 1982); Patrick McGilligan and Paul Buhle, *Tender Comrades: A Backstory of the Hollywood Blacklist* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1997); Ronald Radosh and Allis Radosh, *Red Star over Hollywood: The Film Colony's Long Romance with the Left* (San Francisco, CA: Encounter, 2005).

¹⁷ Natasha Fraser-Cavassoni, *Sam Spiegel* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003). At the time of the making of *We Were Strangers*, Spiegel produced under the name S. P. Eagle.

¹⁸ Louis A. Perez, Jr., *Cuba under the Platt Amendment, 1902-1934* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986); Philip Dur and Christopher Gilcrease, 'US Diplomacy and the Downfall of a Dictator: Machado in 1933', *Journal of Latin-American Studies*, 34, 2, 2002, 255-282.

¹⁹ Robert Sylvester, *Rough Sketch* (New York: Dial Press, 1948).

²⁰ Peter Viertel, *Dangerous Friends: At Large with Huston and Hemingway in the Fifties* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 22-23.

²¹ Fraser-Cavassoni, *Spiegel*, 105-106; Viertel, *Dangerous Friends*, 39

²² Viertel, *Dangerous Friends*, 34.

²³ Dr. Baralt regarding Senator Emetario Santovenia, president of the Cuban Academy of History, to John Huston, undated; *New York Times*, 15 February 1948: *We Were Strangers* folders, PCA Collection, AMPAS; Viertel, *Dangerous Friends*, 30-31, 44.

²⁴ David Selznick, memo to Harry Cohn, 1 February 1949; Selznick to John Huston, 2 February, 1949; Selznick to Lester Roth, 4 February, 1949: Box 64, f. 591, John Huston Collection, AMPAS; Selznick to Lester Roth, 4 January 1948 and 21 October 1948: David Selznick Correspondence relating to *We Were Strangers*, Box 2352, f. 5, David O. Selznick Collection, Harry Ransom Centre, University of Texas, Austin; David Thomson, *Showman: The Life of David O. Selznick* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 509-514.

²⁵ 'Rough Sketch (We Were Strangers)', final draft, 27 August 1948, Box 1734, f. 4, Selznick Collection, Ransom Centre; 'Rough Sketch (We Were Strangers)', draft c. September 1948, Box 64, f. 591, Huston Collection, AMPAS.

²⁶ Huston cited in Pratley, *John Huston*, 72.

²⁷ In September 1948, the PCA asked for a clear contextualisation of the political violence depicted in *We Were Strangers*. It requested rewrites 'to establish in the minds of the audience that this revolutionary body is a legitimate enterprise, and to get away from any flavour that what they are engaging in is murder. More particularly it seems to us important to establish clearly that the regime in office is a tyrannical one, in power by usurpation, and infringing upon the rights of the citizens'. Joseph I. Breen to Harry Cohn, 3 September 1948: *We Were Strangers* folder, PCA Collection, AMPAS. Breen's

request might help explain the late insertion of *We Were Strangers*' epigraph, cited at the beginning of this article.

²⁸ 'Rough Sketch (We Were Strangers)', final drafts, c. August 1948, Box 1734, fs. 3, 4 & 5, Selznick Collection, Ransom Centre; 'Rough Sketch (We Were Strangers)', draft c. September 1948, Box 64, f. 591, Huston Collection, AMPAS.

²⁹ David Selznick to Daniel O'Shea, 9 April 1949: Selznick Collection, Ransom Centre; Viertel, *Dangerous Friends*, 48-53; Jeffrey Brown Martin, *Ben Hecht: Hollywood Screenwriter* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985), 141-160.

³⁰ Robert Sklar, 'Havana Episode: The Revolutionary Situation of *We Were Strangers*', in Gaylyn Studlar and David Desser (eds.), *Reflections in a Male Eye: John Huston and the American Experience* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987), 63-77; Claire Sterling, *The Terror Network: The Secret War of International Terrorism* (New York, Henry Holt, 1981); Matthew Carr, *The Infernal Machine: A History of Terrorism* (New York: The New Press, 2006), pp. 218-222.

³¹ Lou Smith, Director of Publicity, Columbia Studios, 'We Were Strangers' Synopsis, undated, *We Were Strangers* Core File, AMPAS

³² See, for example, *The Telegraph* (London), 2 August 1949. This paper was appalled by Huston's 'perverted' support for the methods of these 'Red terrorists'.

³³ This debate about killing civilians was far lengthier in earlier versions of the script and included the church's attitude towards such acts. 'Rough Sketch (We Were Strangers)', final draft, 27 August 1948, Box 1734, f. 4, Selznick Collection, Ransom Centre.

³⁴ In an early version of the script, Contreras is killed with the help of a boy flinging a petrol-soaked rag at his limousine. This anticipated scenes of Algerian boys shooting

French police officers in *The Battle of Algiers*. 'Rough Sketch (We Were Strangers)', final draft, 27 August 1948, Box 1734, f. 4, Selznick Collection, Ransom Centre.

³⁵ *Variety Weekly*, 27 April 1949.

³⁶ 'Strangers Bows on Broadway with Heavy Take', *Variety*, 2 May 1949; Richard Winnington, 'Tough-Movie Week', *News Chronicle*, 30 July 1949; *Motion Picture Herald*, 30 April 1949, *We Were Strangers* Clippings File, AMPAS; Dilys Powell, 'Films of the Week', *Sunday Times* (London), 31 July 1949: Foreign Press Envelope, Box 2352, f. 5, Selznick Collection, Ransom Centre.

³⁷ Vernon Young to Huston, 8 September 1949, Box 65, f. 594, Huston Collection, AMPAS; Parsons cited in Lester Roth to Mrs. H. Miles Williams, 16 May 1949: *We Were Strangers* folder, PCA Collection, AMPAS.

³⁸ Ceplair and Englund, *Inquisition in Hollywood*, 421.

³⁹ 'Dubious Value To Cuba Revolt Story', *Hollywood Reporter*, 22 April 1949, 3-4; Viertel, *Dangerous Friends*, 54.

⁴⁰ Hedda Hopper, 'McCrae, Day Will Co-star in Musical', *Los Angeles Times*, 25 May 1949, II, 6; Letter, Virginia E. Williams, California Federation of Women's Clubs (Los Angeles District) to Harry Cohn, 9 May 1949: *We Were Strangers* folder, PCA Collection, AMPAS; *Los Angeles Examiner*, 12 May 1949.

⁴¹ Stuart Kaminsky, 'The Films of John Huston', 11 October 1980, *We Were Strangers* Core File, AMPAS; No author, memos on Motion Picture Association of America letterhead, 12 July 1950: *We Were Strangers* folder, PCA Collection, AMPAS.

⁴² Lester Roth to Mrs. H. Miles Williams, 16 May 1949: *We Were Strangers* folder, PCA Collection, AMPAS; 'Studios Eye New Huston Team', *New York Times*, 1 May 1949, IV, 3.

⁴³Jose Yglesias, 'Huston Fails with Movie of 1933 Cuban Uprising', *The Daily Worker*, 28 April 1939, 13; Lester Roth to Mrs. H. Miles Williams, 16 May 1949: *We Were Strangers* folder, PCA Collection, AMPAS.

⁴⁴ Ezra Goodman, 'Letter from Huston', *Los Angeles Independent*, 19 May 1949; Huston to Billy Wilkerson, 10 May 1949, Box 65, f. 594, Huston Collection, AMPAS.

⁴⁵ Sklar; Kaminsky, 'The Films of John Huston', *We Were Strangers* Core File, AMPAS; John McCarty, *The Films of John Huston* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel, 1987), 69-74;
<http://www.tcm.com/this-month/article/253298%7C156522/We-Were-Strangers.html>

⁴⁶ Feeny, 'Hollywood in Havana', 230-233. In Cuba, *We Were Strangers* was titled *Rompiendo las cadenas (Breaking the Chains)*.

⁴⁷ David Selznick to Sidney G. Deneau, 28 January 1950: Box 2352, f. 5, Selznick Collection, Ransom Centre; Fraser-Cavassoni, *Sam Spiegel*, 110.

⁴⁸ Callisto Cosulich to Frank Gervasi, 10 August 1959, Box 65, f. 594, Huston Collection, AMPAS.

⁴⁹ Feeny, 'Hollywood in Havana', 370-376.

⁵⁰ David Selznick to Mr. Maree, 27 August 1951; David Selznick, telegram to LT, 1 April 1959: Box 2352, f. 5, Selznick Collection, Ransom Centre.

⁵¹ John Loken, *Oswald's Trigger Films* (San Ramon, CA: Falcon, 2000);
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjrKYRbMZDY>

⁵² See miscellaneous telegrams and reports on *We Were Strangers*' reception in Box 2352, f. 5, Selznick Collection, Ransom Centre.

⁵³ In 1982, the US State Department added Cuba to its list of 'state sponsors of terrorism'. On *Red Dawn*'s development into a key text spelling out the threat posed to the US by communist-inspired terrorism see *Red Dawn* file, Box 6, Buzz Feitshans

Collection, AMPAS; 'Ten Soldiers', revised second draft script by Kevin Reynolds, 27 October 1982, Collection 073, Box F-741 and 'Red Dawn' AKA 'Ten Soldiers', shooting script by Kevin Reynolds and John Milius, 19 October 1983, Collection 073, Box F-24: Arts Library Special Collections, University of California Los Angeles.

⁵⁴ For a useful overview of Hollywood's treatment of terrorism since the 1960s see Robert Cettl, *Terrorism in American Cinema* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009). To help place Hollywood's treatment of terrorism in international perspective see Tony Shaw, *Cinematic Terror: A Global History of Terrorism on Film* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

⁵⁵ <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/hemingway-biopic-papa-first-hollywood-701957>; <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/11/papa-film-hemingway-havana-hollywood-us-cuba-trade-embargo>.