

OFFICE OF WAR INFORMATION
BUREAU OF MOTION PICTURES
HOLLYWOOD OFFICE

Film Analysis Section

FEATURE REVIEW

Title CASABLANCA *** Showing time 95 minutes
Studio producing Warner Bros. Studio releasing WB Rel. date Feb., 1943 (Sched.
Writers Screenplay by Julius and Philip Epstein and Howard Koch, from play by
Murray Burnett and Joan Alison
Producer Hal Wallis Grade of Picture (A) B Not clear
Classification: Major: III B (United Nations - Conquered Nations) Drama
Minor: II C 3 (Enemy - Military) Drama
Seen by Nelson Poynter Where seen Warner Bros Date October 26, 1942
Dorothy Jones " " "
Seen by Marjorie Thorson Where seen " Date "
Lillian Bergquist " "
Reviewed by Lillian Bergquist Date October 28, 1942

To Casablanca, coastal city of French Morocco, come refugees seeking visas for Lisbon, America -- and freedom. Many wait for endless months, because officials are corrupt, and without money for bribes it is difficult to get anything. While the refugees wait, they seek forgetfulness and gaiety in the American Cafe, a nightclub operated by Rick, an expatriate American. One day two German couriers are murdered and robbed of their letters of transit. Major Strasser, arrogant official from the Third Reich, has come to Casablanca to stimulate French-Nazi "cooperation", and demands arrest of the guilty one. The French Prefect of Police, Captain Renault, assures Strasser that the murderer will be caught that night at Rick's Cafe -- because everyone shows up there sooner or later. The culprit, a Black Market dealer in visas, is arrested, but not before he has persuaded Rick to hold the letters of transit for safekeeping. That night to the Cafe come Victor and Ilsa Laszlo. Victor is a leader of Europe's underground movement; he has escaped from a concentration camp and must continue his work in America. When Strasser learns he is in Casablanca, he gives orders that no visas be issued, for by forcing Victor to remain in Casablanca, and later murdering him, Strasser will destroy much of the underground. Ilsa Laszlo is a girl with whom Rick had an unhappy love affair in Paris. Still loving her, but embittered, Rick refuses to aid the couple by giving them the letters of transit in his possession. Ilsa tells Rick that he must put the defeat of fascism before his personal desires, and reminds him that he has fought for democracy in the past, in Ethiopia and Spain. She tells him, too, that she still loves him, but owes loyalty to Victor. Rick makes his decision. He gives them the letters and although Ilsa is finally willing to remain in Casablanca with him he shows her that she will do her best work in the war by helping Victor. If they thought only of their personal happiness at this time they would always regret it. In aiding them to escape, Rick is forced to kill Strasser. His only witness is Captain Renault -- who proves where his own loyalties really lie by escaping with Rick to the nearest Free French garrison.

10/28/42

From the standpoint of the war information program, CASABLANCA is a very good picture about the enemy, those whose lives the enemy has wrecked and those underground agents who fight him unremittingly on his own ground. The war content is dramatically effective. Many excellent points are scored:

- (1) The film presents an excellent picture of the spirit of the underground movement. Victor Laszlo, a Czech patriot, has fought fascism by printing the truth about it in illegal newspapers in Prague and Paris. He has suffered in a concentration camp, from which he finally escaped. Unintimidated by his experiences he plans to continue his work. In Casablanca, a Norwegian anti-Nazi says: "The underground is well organized here as everywhere." We learn that people of all nationalities meet secretly everywhere, despite the danger, planning the destruction of the oppressor. Their courage, determination and self-sacrifice should make Americans proud of these underground allies.
- (2) Some of the chaos and misery which fascism and the war has brought are graphically illustrated. Refugees of all nationalities are crowded into Casablanca. A few have money, but it goes quickly. They attempt to sell their jewels, but the market is flooded. Some refugees are reduced to stealing; women sell themselves; others bribe corrupt officials who in turn doublecross them. There are pickpockets, murderers, Black Markets in visas. Personal honor and dignity have departed; degradation and treachery have taken their place. This is part of what fascism has brought in its wake. Another facet of Nazi aggression is shown in scenes which depict the Nazi march into Paris. A sense of the horror and confusion of the French population is very well projected.
- (3) It is shown that personal desires must be subordinated to the task of defeating fascism. To Laszlo and the other underground workers, the defeat of fascism is of paramount importance. The heroine and the man she loves sacrifice their personal happiness in order that each may carry on the fight in the most effective manner. They realize that they cannot steal happiness with the rest of the world enslaved.
- (4) It is brought out that many French are by no means cooperating wholeheartedly with the Nazis. Renault, the French Prefect of Police, tells Rick that he "goes the way the wind blows". He is cynical and not above taking bribes. Yet, when Rick, the American hero, murders Strasser, Renault not only allows him to escape, but goes with him to the nearest Free French garrison. Then again, the French people in Rick's cafe, led by Laszlo, the Czech patriot, courageously sing the Marseillaise to drown out the song of their conquerors. Here is illustrated the love and pride of the French in their country, conquered though it is. We feel that it will rise again.
- (5) America is shown as the haven of the oppressed and homeless.

Refugees want to come to the United States because here they are assured of freedom, democratic privileges and immunity from fear. The love and esteem with which this country is regarded by oppressed peoples should make audiences aware of their responsibilities as Americans to uphold this reputation and fight fascism with all that is in them.

- (6) Some of the scope of our present conflict is brought out. It is established that Rick, the American cafe owner, fought for the Loyalists in the Spanish Civil War, and for democracy as far back as 1935 and 1936, when he smuggled guns for the Ethiopians. Points like these aid audiences in understanding that our war did not commence with Pearl Harbor, but that the roots of aggression reach far back.
- (7) The film presents a good portrayal of the typical Nazi. In the arrogant Major Strasser, with his contempt for anything not German, his disregard for human life and dignity, his determination that all peoples shall bow to the Third Reich, we get a picture of the Nazi outlook. These are the kind of men who would enslave the world.