



**BIG SCREEN CLASSICS**

# Inside Man

A dark secret lies at the heart of *Inside Man*, Spike Lee's otherwise upbeat take on the heist genre. The film casts Denzel Washington, reunited with Lee for their fourth collaboration, as an NYPD detective tasked with handling a hostage crisis and bank robbery. With its wisecracking script and twisting plot, *Inside Man* bears comparison to such heist films as *The Anderson Tapes* (1971) and *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975) – both of which Lee screened to his cast during rehearsals. The true valuable in the vaults, however, is a document that threatens to undo bank chairman Christopher Plummer's life of good deeds. 'He's been trying to wash that blood off his hands but he can't do it,' says Lee. 'There are some crimes for which atonement is impossible.'

*Inside Man* shows Lee swapping the passionate invective of *Do the Right Thing* (1989) and *Malcolm X* (1992) for a breezy playfulness. The director is keen, though, to rebuff any thoughts that he's selling out. 'You might not be able to tell it from my films, but I'm a relatively optimistic person. Most scripts I get sent are garbage, so when I saw something as well written as this I knew it was special.'

The film's marketing has downplayed Lee's involvement, but *Inside Man* still bears many of his trademarks. Despite being set largely within the confines of the bank, it gives the same sense of his native New York as a city still struggling to lay to rest its ghosts as pervaded his elegiac post-9/11 *25th Hour* (2002). 'The wound is still open,' says Lee.

He also injects the film's generic swagger with typical moments of social consciousness. One scene has an American Sikh hostage released by his captors only to be treated as a suspect by the patrolling SWAT team. 'He's a fucking Arab,' shouts one officer nervously as the innocent man is wrestled to the ground and has his turban removed and searched for explosives. 'I put that scene in the script myself,' says Lee. 'If you have a turban on you still get funny looks going through airports. But the thing about New York is that everyone is a foreigner. You can walk down the street and hear five different languages.'

That the director plays the scene for laughs is evidence of how far he has moved on since his incendiary masterpiece *Do the Right Thing* had American commentators predicting race riots after its opening. But where *Do the Right Thing* offered a state-of-the-union address on race, *Inside Man*'s underlying concern is class. At one point Jodie Foster's enigmatic troubleshooter, brought in by Plummer to retrieve his documents, warns Washington's character that he's getting ideas above his pay grade. 'I wouldn't say that class has superseded race in America, but it's equal,' says Lee. 'What

happened in New Orleans with Hurricane Katrina is evidence of that. Most of the people affected by it were poor, whether white or black.’ Lee was so angered by the authorities’ slow response that he decided to make *When the Levee Broke*, a feature-length documentary for HBO. ‘We’re still shooting it. What’s hard about the project is that the story changes every day,’ he says.

Lee was able to juggle *Inside Man* and his Katrina project thanks to his breakneck pace of working. Despite its elaborate set-ups and big cast, *Inside Man* was shot on location in New York in just 39 days. ‘It drives me crazy waiting for the DP to light a shot for five hours,’ he says. ‘You can’t get good performances from actors if they have to sit for six hours in their trailers before they can come on set. With *Inside Man* we always shot with two cameras so the actors were never waiting.’

Lee’s most commercial venture in years arrives when Paul Haggis’ Oscar-winning *Crash* has once more brought the cinematic representation of race to public attention. Does Lee see *Crash*’s success as an indication that times have changed? ‘I just think the Academy didn’t want to give Best Picture to a film about gay cowboys,’ he says. ‘But I don’t know if the studios would even make *Do the Right Thing* today. A film about racism by a white director is viewed differently from a film about racism by a black director. That’s just the bottom line.’

**Ali Jaafar, *Sight & Sound*, May 2006**

The filmmakers, actors and publicists behind *Inside Man* are keen to emphasise the movie’s links with the great cop movies of the 1970s: gritty New York thrillers like *The French Connection*, *Dog Day Afternoon* and *Serpico*. Indeed, Russell Gewirtz’s brusque screenplay gamely namechecks both the latter two movies (‘I don’t need your fuckin’ status report, Serpico,’ hisses Clive Owen’s master bank robber to Denzel Washington’s bamboozled negotiator), and director Spike Lee has announced that the film is a ‘contemporary take’ on *Dog Day Afternoon*.

And yet, *Inside Man* is even closer in spirit to Norman Jewison’s glossy *The Thomas Crown Affair* and its even glossier 1999 John McTiernan remake. For this is a shamelessly specious movie about an improbable super-heist, planned by a comic-book master criminal, and executed with a precision and preternatural awareness of police procedure that borders on the fantastical. It’s glossy, it’s upbeat, it’s superficial, and it’s wildly implausible. And for the most part, Lee, a serious cine-provocateur, has fun with this.

Working with mainstream producer Brian Grazer (last year’s *Flightplan*) for the first time, Lee orchestrates the high-stakes drama with a slick adrenalised urgency that wouldn’t be out of place in a multiplex actioner. The codified visuals of DoP Matthew Libatique (*Requiem for a Dream*, 2000, Lee’s *She Hate Me*, 2004) carefully contrasts jittery handheld shots from outside the bank with the slick steely moves inside and the inky saturated footage from a

dreamlike interrogation room where Washington's cop struggles to differentiate hostage and robber after both are rounded up (each dressed in boiler suits) in the confusion of the heist's ending. The soundtrack score from Lee regular Terence Blanchard has undeniable echoes of John Barry's Bond work swooning through it (utterly appropriate given the fantastical milieu). While the machinations of the heist plot itself, released by Lee in tantalising dribs and drabs, tends to lend the director the air of the surrogate criminal mastermind: like Owen's Dalton Russell, he is pulling the strings.

The cast play their stock characters with gusto. Owen in particular, masked by a white scarf for over half the movie, keeps a tonal intensity to his delivery that never falters while Jodie Foster, in perhaps the movie's weakest role, playing a high-flying corporate fixer, explores a hitherto unseen smugness that provides a surprising counterbalance to the saintly mom persona she's perfected in recent roles (see *Panic Room*, *Flightplan*, *Anna and the King*).

In spite of the gloss, *Inside Man* still displays intriguing hints of the truly gritty movie that's lying just below its polished surface – a movie that Lee might have made for a less mainstream producer. The director intermittently picks at the racial and political sores of post-9/11 metropolitan life. A Sikh security guard, for instance, is forced from the bank and pinned to the ground by a panicked New York policeman who screams, 'Shit! It's a fuckin' Arab!' The security guard's muffled cries of, 'I'm a Sikh!' remain, naturally, unheard by the cop. The hostages who eventually emerge from the bank are treated to rough racial profiling, with darker skins falling under immediate suspicion. The political tenor of the war on terror also surfaces in the heavy-handed interrogation scenes, with the interviewees cuffed, hooded and boiler-suited Guantanamo-style: everyone in the bank – both hostage and criminal is guilty by association just by being there.

**Kevin Maher, *Sight & Sound*, May 2006**

INSIDE MAN

Directed by: Spike Lee  
©: Universal Studios, GH Two LLC  
Production Company: Brian Grazer Productions  
Presented by: Universal Pictures, Imagine Entertainment  
Logo: 40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks  
Executive Producers: Daniel M. Rosenberg, Jon Kilik, Karen Kehela Sherwood, Kim Roth  
Produced by: Brian Grazer  
Co-producer: Jonathan Filley  
Unit Production Manager: Jonathan Filley  
Production Supervisor: Colin Cumberbatch  
Production Accountant: Mike Phillips  
Location Manager: Joseph White  
Post-production Supervisor: Susan Lazarus  
1st Assistant Director: Mike Ellis  
Continuity: Shari L. Carpenter  
Casting: Kim Taylor-Coleman  
Written by: Russell Gewirtz  
Director of Photography: Matthew Libatique  
A Camera Operator: Stephen Consentino  
Camera Operator: Ricardo Sarmiento  
Steadicam Operator: Stephen Consentino  
Gaffer: John Velez  
Key Grip: Lamont Crawford  
Video Camera Operator: Kerwin Devonish  
Still Photographer: David C. Lee  
Visual Effects: Big Film Design  
Special Effects Supervisor: Steve Kirshoff  
Graphic Artist: Leo Holder  
Editor: Barry Alexander Brown  
Additional Editor: Sam Pollard  
Production Design: Wynn Thomas  
Art Director: Chris Shriver  
Set Decorator: George Detitta Jr  
Property Master: Michael A. Saccio  
Costume Design: Donna Berwick  
Key Make-up Artist: Anita Gibson  
Key Hairstylist: Kenneth Walker  
Title Design: Big Film Design  
Negative Cutter: Paul Tanzillo  
Film Colour Timer: Terry Hager  
Digital Intermediate: EFilm  
Music: Terence Blanchard  
Conductor: Terence Blanchard  
Orchestrators: Terence Blanchard, Howard Drossin  
Production Sound Mixer: William Sarokin  
Boom Operator: George Leong  
Supervising Sound Mixer: Tom Fleischman  
Additional Re-recording Mixer: Bob Chefalas  
Re-recordingist: Dave Bihldorf  
Supervising Sound Editor: Philip Stockton  
Sound Effects Design: Eugene Gearty  
Sound Effects Editor: Allan Zaleski  
Stunt Co-ordinator: Jeff Ward  
NYPD Detective Consultant: Detective Neil Carter  
MCC Consultant: Timothy Kane  
ESU Special Consultant: Detective Ed Bogdanowicz  
Dolby Sound Consultant: Steve F.B. Smith  
Dialect Coach: Carla Meyer, Howard Samuelsohn

Cast

Denzel Washington (Detective Keith Frazier)  
Clive Owen (Dalton Russell)  
Jodie Foster (Madeleine White)  
Christopher Plummer (Arthur Case)  
Willem Dafoe (Captain John Darius)  
Chiwetel Ejiofor (Detective Bill Mitchell)  
Carlos Andrés Gómez (Steve)  
Kim Director (Stevie)  
James Ransone (Steve-O)  
Bernard Rachele (Chaim)  
Peter Gerety (Captain Coughlin)  
Victor Colicchio (Sergeant Collins)  
Cassandra Freeman (Sylvia)  
Peter Frechette (Peter Hammond)  
Gerry Vichi (Herman Gluck)  
Waris Ahluwalia (Vikram Walia)  
Rafael Osorio (bank guard)  
Rodney ‘Bear’ Jackson (bank guard)  
Daryl Mitchell (Mobile Command Officer Rourke)  
Ashlie Atkinson (Mobile Command Officer Berk)  
David Brown (Mobile Command Officer Carnow)  
Robert C. Kirk (Mobile Command Officer Borinsky)  
Frank Stellato (Mobile Command detective)  
Ken Leung (Wing)  
Marcia Jean Kurtz (Miriam Douglas)  
Ed Onipede Blunt (Ray Robinson)  
Amir Ali Said (Brian Robinson)  
Lemon Andersen (Paul Guitierrez)  
Samantha Ivers (Nancy Mann)  
Peter Kybart (mayor)  
Jason Manuel Olazábal (ESU Officer Hernandez)  
Jeff Ward (ESU Officer Jesus)  
Anthony Mangano, Michael Devine, Ed Bogdanowicz, Aaron Vexler, Anthony Borowiec, Joe Coots (ESU officers)  
Lionel Pina (cop with pizzas)  
Ken Ferrigni (redheaded detective)  
Frank Hopf, Robert Testut (barricade officers)  
Craig Marcus Spitzer (Seth Greenblatt)  
Lily Agosto (Gladys Perez)  
Patrick Illig (Brad Stone)  
Frank Composto (Eric Dodge)  
Rozanne Sher (hostage woman)  
Rachel Matthews Black (Katherine)  
Gregory Dann (Case’s bodyguard)  
Ben Crowley (White’s assistant)  
Shon Gables (CBS news reporter)  
Dominic Carter (NY1 news anchor)  
Sandra Endo (NY1 news reporter)  
Kandiss Edmundson (Madge)  
Al Palagonia (Kevin)  
Florina Petcu (Ilina)  
Agim Coma (Borova)  
John Speridakos (Porcario)  
Baktash Khadem Zaher (Zahir)  
Ernest Rayford (men’s club attendant)  
Vincent DiMartino (barber)  
Julian Niccolini (Four Seasons maître d’)  
Ed Crescimanni (Edwin)  
Bradley Williams (Ronnie)

USA 2006  
129 mins

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