

Indigènes / Days of Glory (2006)

Director: Rachid Bouchareb

Screenplay: Rachid Bouchareb, Olivier Lorelle

Cast: Saïd: Jamel Debbouze; Yassir: Samy Naceri; Messaoud: Roschdy Zem; Abdelkader: Sami Bouajila; Sergent Roger Martinez: Bernard Blancan

Awards: Best Screenplay, Lumière Awards (2007); Best Writing, César Awards (2007); Best Actor (male ensemble cast), Cannes Film Festival (2006)



In *Indigènes/Days of Glory*, director Rachid Bouchareb (*Dust of Life*, *Little Senegal*) unites the thematic elements of a classic war film: bravery, honor, love, brotherhood, etc. At the same time, the names of the heroes: Abdelkader (Sami Bouajila), Saïd (Jamel Debbouze), Messaoud (Roschdy Zem) and Yassir (Samy Naceri) seem far from typical. They are colonized North Africans, derogatively known by the French as “indigènes” or “natives.”

Bouchareb recounts the often neglected story of how some 200,000 African troops were sent into Europe during World War II to help save France from German occupation. The film made an emblematic debut in Cannes, where it received the prize for best male actor, awarded in fact to the entire ensemble cast. It was on the same shores in the south of France that African soldiers had landed sixty years ago. More importantly, *Indigènes'* political message was heard so clearly that it incited Jacques Chirac to reinstate pensions that had been frozen since 1959, bringing some long overdue justice to these unsung war heroes and their families.

Through aerial shots of deserts, wheat fields, rivers and mountains, *Indigènes* tracks the African soldiers' journey from their homeland to the “motherland” through hard and often unrewarded battles, both physical as well as ideological as they struggle for “Liberty, Equality and Fraternity” alongside their French colonizers. They are good enough to fight for France's freedom, but unjustly cannot take leave, nor dine on fresh tomatoes, as the French can. As Ali Jaafar from *Sight and Sound* magazine remarks, “preserving democracy and practicing it, it seems, are two different things.” The film also demonstrates the stratified hierarchy among the North Africans themselves, as Martinez, a self-proclaimed *pied-noir* (North African born man of French descent) hides his mother's Algerian heritage so that he may be granted promotions.

Liz Braun from the *Sun Media* proclaims, “Days of Glory is an extraordinary document, part war film, part love story, part history lesson.” This film finally gives a voice to men who have gone far too long unheard.

Program notes prepared by: Eric Dalle, Tricia Dimit, Paul Hartley, Aubrey Korneta, Lauren Messina, Bill Pedersen, Émilie Tarraf.