



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Chi-Raq

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Directed by: Spike Lee
©: Da Chi-Lite Joint Inc.

Production Company:

40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks

This production participated in: New York State Governor's Office for Motion Picture & Television Development's Post Production Credit Program

Presented by: Amazon Studios

Executive Producers: Jon Kilik, Kevin Willmott

Produced by: Spike Lee

Line Producer: Jason Sokoloff

Unit Production Manager: Jason Sokoloff

Locations Manager: Monoletto Wilborn

Post-production Supervisor: Jonathan Ferrantelli

1st Assistant Director: Randy Fletcher

Script Supervisor: Mary Tallman

Castings: Kim Coleman

Written by: Kevin Willmott, Spike Lee

Director of Photography: Matthew Libatique

Visual Effects by: Big Film Design

Editors: Ryan Denmark, Hye Mee Na

Production Design: Alex DiGerlando

Art Direction: David Meyer

Set Designer: Jessie Haddad

Costume Design: Ruth E. Carter

Department Head Make-up: Suzi Ostos

Department Head Hair: Cheryl Pickenpack

Titles by: Big Film Design

Title Designer: Randy Balsmeyer

Music Score: Terence Blanchard

Keyboardist: Michael Drayton

Trumpet: Brian Schwab

Saxophone: John Goldman

Violin: Zara Zahareiva

Bass: Joshua Ramos

Vibraphone: Justin Thomas

Trombone: Kendall Moore

Drums: William 'Plu' Harmon

Percussion: Walter O'Neil

Organist: Pierre Walker

Guitar: Augustin Alvarez

Choreography: Maija Garcia

Head of Movement: Maija Garcia

Sound Design: Phil Stockton

Production Sound Mixer: David Obermeyer

Re-recording Mixer: Paul Hsu

Supervising Sound Editor: Philip Stockton

Stunt Co-ordinator: Jeff Ward

Cast:

Nick Cannon (*Demetrius Dupree*, 'Chi-Raq')

Wesley Snipes (*Cyclops*)

Teyonah Parris (*Lysistrata*)

Jennifer Hudson (*Irene*)

Steve Harris (*Old Duke*)

Harry Lennix (*Commissioner Blades*)

D.B. Sweeney (*Mayor McCloud*)

Angela Bassett (*Miss Helen*)

John Cusack (*Father Mike Corridan*)

Samuel L. Jackson (*Dolmedes*)

Anya Engel-Adams (*Rasheeda*)

Michelle Mitchener (*Indigo*)

Ebony Joy (*Marcy*)

Felicia 'Snoop' Pearson (*Dania*)

La La Anthony (*Hecuba*)

Val Warner (*Electra Johnson*)

David Patrick Kelly (*Major King Kong*)

Sarunas Jackson (*Big Mike*)

Corey Hendrix (*Jah*)

William Binion Gines (*Armonty*)

Prince Eazy (*Cairo*)

Lorraine Ward (*Kandy*)

MJ Carey (*Sergeant Toney*)

In more than three decades as a filmmaker, Spike Lee has tackled topics as far-ranging as college fraternities, jazz music, the Son of Sam murder spree and influential Black nationalist Malcolm X, but his latest film, *Chi-Raq*, enters uncharted territory even for the prolific writer and director. From its incendiary title – a street-slang sobriquet that combines 'Chicago' and 'Iraq' in a grimly satirical reminder of the rampant violence currently plaguing the city – to its classical roots, *Chi-Raq* is sure to spark a firestorm of commentary with its depiction of life in a community that has become a combat zone.

'I first heard the term "Chi-Raq" about two years ago,' recalls Lee. 'After the killings of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner and so many other people of colour, I started to post portraits of African-Americans slain by civilians or law enforcement on Instagram. I got so many responses from people in Chicago saying, you need to look what's happening here.'

Lee learned that Chicago was undergoing a wave of violence that surpassed any other city in the U.S., with blood-soaked statistics that rival those of a war-torn country. In the first 10 months of 2015, more than 2,500 people had been shot in Chicago. The same period saw 430 homicides. The city had become the poster child for urban violence.

'How is it possible that New York City has three times the population of Chicago, yet Chicago has more homicides than New York City?' asks Lee.

'How is it possible that Los Angeles has maybe one and a half times the population of Chicago and Chicago has more homicides than L.A.? It doesn't bring me joy to say that. But a greater crime would be to duck my head in the sand and not acknowledge what's going on.'

Never one to pull punches, Lee grapples with violence in America head-on in *Chi-Raq*, with a special focus on the sensitive subject of Black-on-Black crime. 'It is like a war out there,' he says. 'It's not just Chicago or New York – Baltimore, Maryland, is known as "Body More, Murderland" – but it's on another level in Chicago because of the gangs. And it's not just an urban issue. Right now, all across America, there are mass shootings. People are being gunned down left and right. This film is not only a declaration against the violence in Chicago, but the violence all across America.'

In a bold move, Lee and his co-writer Kevin Willmott have taken the inspiration for *Chi-Raq* from a play written almost 2,500 years ago, transferring the action of Aristophanes' satirical masterpiece *Lysistrata* from ancient Greece to the South Side of Chicago. As in the original play, an audacious woman ends a war by organising a sex strike that forces the powerful men around her to put down their weapons.

'It was Kevin who came up with the idea of taking the play and making a contemporary version of it,' says Lee. 'We just went back to the original source and took the conceit of women on a sex strike and placed it on the South Side of Chicago.'

Willmott, a writer and director as well as a professor of film studies at the University of Kansas, impressed Lee with his critically acclaimed 2004

Samuel G. Robertson Jr (*Private Alto*)
Tony Fitzpatrick (*Chief Riptide*)
USA 2015©
127 mins
Digital

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mockumentary *CSA: The Confederate States of America*, a satirical history of the United States – written as if the South had won the Civil War.

Willmott had read *Lysistrata* in college and even appeared in a production of it. 'Aristophanes, the great Greek playwright, wrote the play in 411 BC,' he says. 'In it, a group of women who are tired of their men going to war all the time decide to bring them to their senses in the only way they know how. We held on to the structure of the play and incorporated the realities that Chicago and other cities are facing today. It speaks not just to war, but to violence in general.'

Lysistrata's initially disapproving neighbour and eventual mentor, Miss Helen, is played by Oscar-nominee Angela Bassett. The role reunites the actress with Lee for the first time since she played Dr Betty Shabazz in his 1992 film, *Malcolm X*. 'I love Spike's enthusiasm,' Bassett says. 'It's in his voice, on his face, in his body. His style is very straight and to the point. He gives you a lot of room to create, but he's very specific about his vision.'

Bassett was drawn to both the subject matter and the technical challenges of the script. 'This is such an important topic,' she says. 'It seems like nobody wants to talk about Black-on-Black crime. How has it been swept under the carpet? Growing up in a certain generation, we learned not to let our slips show. This movie will shine a light on a problem we can't hide anymore. If we think nothing of killing each other, then we've lost our humanity, our trust in God and in each other.'

Miss Helen runs the House of Common Sense and Home of Proper Propaganda, a local bookstore and gathering place for the women of the community. The character reminds Bassett of many of the women who surrounded and supported her as child in the projects of St Petersburg, Florida. 'I was raised by a single mom,' Bassett recalls. 'All around us there were teachers, choir leaders, principals and vice principals who really took ownership of our present and our future. They were invested. That's who Miss Helen is. She's invested in this community. She and the elders are on hand to guide Lysistrata and the younger women through this time.'

Production notes