



Close to the Edge: The Films of Kathryn Bigelow

Detroit

Detroit

Directed by: Kathryn Bigelow

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A Harpers Ferry/Page 1 production

Presented by: Annapurna Pictures

Executive Producers: Greg Shapiro, Hugo Lindgren

Produced by: Megan Ellison, Kathryn Bigelow, Matthew Budman, Mark Boal, Colin Wilson

Co-producers: Jillian Longnecker, Jonathan Leven

Associate Producers: Sumaiya Kaveh, April Janow

Unit Production Manager: Colin Wilson

Production Supervisor: Bryan Yaconelli

Production Co-ordinator: Paula Stier

Assistant Production Co-ordinator: Hannah Roble

Production Accountant: April Janow

Location Managers: Charles Harrington, Gregory Chiodo

Post-production Supervisor: Tina Anderson

Production Secretary: Devin McDonough

Researcher: Lance Malbon

1st Assistant Director: Simon Warnock

2nd Assistant Director: Christophe Le Chanu

2nd 2nd Assistant Director: Timothy P. LaDue

Additional Second Assistant Director: Katie Valovcin

Script Supervisor: Luca Kouimelis

Casting by: Victoria Thomas

New York Casting by: Richard Hicks

Extras Casting by: Ryan Hill

Written by: Mark Boal

Director of Photography: Barry Ackroyd

B Camera Operator: Christopher T.J. McGuire

C Camera Operator: Josh Medak

D Camera Operator: John Garrett

Steadicam Operator: Christopher T.J. McGuire

1st Assistant A Camera: Markus Mentzer

1st Assistant B Camera: Greg Wimer

1st Assistant C Camera: Darryl Byrne

1st Assistant D Camera: Christian Hollyer

2nd Assistant A Camera: Tonja Greenfield

2nd Assistant B Camera: Zack Shultz

2nd Assistant C Camera: Katherine Castro

2nd Assistant D Camera: Talia Krohmal

Digital Imaging Technician: Kyo Moon

Film Loader: Matt Hedges

Gaffer: Kelly Clear

Key Grip: John Janusek

Best Boy Grip: Michael Panenka

Video Assist: Jonathan Kobs

Still Photographer: François Duhamel

Visual Effects & Animation by: Image Engine

Visual Effects by: Zero VFX

Special Effects Co-ordinator: John Ruggieri

Edited by: William Goldenberg, Harry Yoon

Additional Editor: Brett Reed

Assistant Editor: Peter Dudgeon

Visual Effects Editor: Justin Yates

Production Designer: Jeremy Hindle

Supervising Art Director: Greg Bery

Art Director: Jim Wallis

Set Designers: Bryan Lane, Patrick Scalise

Set Decorator: Kathy Lucas

Graphic Designer: Wendy Drapanas

Property Master: Will Blount

Costume Designer: Francine Jamison-Tanchuck

Assistant Costume Designer: Dan Lester

Costume Supervisor: Robert G. Matthews

Department Head Make-up: Whitney James

Key Make-up Artist: Claudia Pascual

Department Head Hair: Camille Friend

Key Hair Stylist: Nikki Wright

Prologue & Epilogue Designed by: Paul Rollens

Main Title Designed by: BLT: AV Inc.

End Crawl by: Scarlet Letters

A typical Kathryn Bigelow title is like a code begging to be broken. We can make an educated guess as to where on the clock *Zero Dark Thirty* might be. But how would we know if we came face to face with *K-19: The Widowmaker*? When might one expect to reach *Point Break*, whatever that is? And precisely how much space is there inside a *Hurt Locker*? *Strange Days*, indeed.

No such unscrambling is necessary in the case of her latest film, *Detroit*. The picture is named not merely for the Midwestern city to which its action is confined (though it was actually shot in Boston), but for the connotations of racism and violence stemming from the riots which blazed through Detroit for five days in the summer of 1967, leaving 43 people dead, most of them African Americans. Three of those, in turn, were killed by police at the Algiers Motel during a protracted night of intimidation and torture that included the beatings of a further nine black men and two white women.

The movie begins with an animated prologue which uses the work of the artist Jacob Lawrence to show how the passage of US civil rights at that time, and the social and economic obstacles it faced, created the particular hothouse situation in Detroit. Expectations of equality collided head-on with the realities of poverty, poor housing, unemployment and, most dangerously, a predominantly white, racist police force. From there, Bigelow assembles a mosaic-like portrait of how the riots started and who was involved. Over the course of more than two hours, the focus tightens gradually on to just one man, the singer Larry Reed (Algee Smith). Reed had ducked into the Algiers that night on a whim, booking himself a room there to avoid getting tangled up in the trouble on the streets, only to find himself targeted by the vicious cop Krauss (Will Poulter) and his mad-dog colleagues.

'The canvas was at first so sprawling,' says the 65-year-old Bigelow, speaking on the phone from New York, 50 years to the day since the riots began on 23 July 1967. 'But I knew I wanted to show how a situation becomes so difficult and problematic that a group of people will burn their own houses down. What is the anatomy of an uprising? That's what I was trying to unpack. There's a great quote by Martin Luther King – "A riot is the language of the unheard" – which seemed apposite to this situation. And there was this timeline of uprisings, riots, rebellions across the country, a kind of perfect storm which helped result in the events in Detroit. So I wanted to start wide and then telescope down to a series of characters before winnowing it down to just a handful and then even further to just one, going from the macro to the micro. I'm trying to humanise it in order to understand it; that's where empathy comes from. Systemic racism is very abstract. Comprehending it on a human level is the challenge of the story.'

What the film demonstrates most persuasively is the near-impossibility of avoiding flak when you're black. Even Melvin Dismukes (John Boyega), a security guard who does everything in his power to placate the authorities, including taking coffee to the National Guard soldiers stationed in the streets, finally comes a cropper. Carl (Jason Mitchell), one of the guests at the Algiers, puts it best: 'When you're black, it's almost like having a gun pointed straight at your face.' Bigelow ensures that the audience feels as much as possible as though it is staring into the barrel of that gun. She has always been an

Colourist: Stephan Nakamura
Music by: James Newton Howard
Ambient Music by: Michael Abels
Additional Music by: Karen Han
Orchestra Conducted by: Gavin Greenaway
Music Supervisors: George Drakoulis,
Randall Poster
Supervising Music Editor: Curt Sobel
Choreography: Kelly Devine
Sound Design by: Paul N.J. Ottosson
Sound Mixer: Ray Beckett
Boom Operator: Joel Reidy
Sound Utility: Ryan Baker
Re-recording Mixer: Paul N.J. Ottosson
Stunt Co-ordinator: Stephen Pope
Detroit Stunt Co-ordinator: Ele Bardha
Stunts: Bobby Beckles, Bryce Biederman,
Michael Brennan, Califf Guzman, Robert L. Harvey,
Derek Johnson, Jeff Medeiros, Brandon Shaw,
Peter Wallack
Consultants: Julie Ann Hysell, Larry Reed,
Melvin Dismukes, David Zeman
Police Adviser: Bob O'Toole
Unit Publicist: Scott Levine
Digital Intermediate provided by: Company 3
Cast:
John Boyega (*Melvin Dismukes*)
Will Poulter (*Philip Krauss*)
Algee Smith (*Larry Reed*)
Jacob Latimore (*Fred*)
Jason Mitchell (*Carl*)
Hannah Murray (*Julie*)
Kaitlyn Dever (*Karen*)
Jack Reynor (*Demens*)
Ben O'Toole (*Flynn*)
Nathan Davis Jr (*Aubrey*)
Peyton Alex Smith (*Lee*)
Malcolm David Kelley (*Michael*)
Joseph David-Jones (*Morris*)
Laz Alonso (*Congressman Conyers*)
Ephraim Sykes (*Jimmy*)
Leon Thomas III (*Darryl*)
Gbenga Akinnagbe (*Aubrey Pollard Sr*)
Chris Chalk (*Officer Frank*)
Jeremy Strong (*Attorney Lang*)
Austin Hébert (*Warrant Officer Roberts*)
Miguel Pimentel (*Malcolm*)
Khris Davis (*Blind Pig patron*)
John Krasinski (*Attorney Auerbach*)
Anthony Mackie (*Greene*)
USA 2017©
143 mins
Digital

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SIGHT AND SOUND

immersive director, from the frantic chases in *Point Break* (1991), shot on handheld 35mm with a gyro-stabiliser, to the extended POV fantasies of *Strange Days* (1995) and the quasi-documentary intensity of *The Hurt Locker* (2008). The battle of the Algiers Motel, which will come to define Detroit for anyone who sees it, is an example of her approach at its most unsparing. 'Speaking to the people who survived that and listening to their recollections of that night solidified for me a desire to replicate it. I was sensitive to the intensity of it but I wanted to be faithful to that intensity also.' When she tells me that she was working concurrently during the making of Detroit on a virtual reality short, *The Protectors*, which provides a 360-degree experience in the field of elephant preservation, it is easy to see how the techniques of one film bled into the other. As its airless, claustrophobic hold tightens, *Detroit* may just as well have been shot in the VR format.

Among her crew were some notable former collaborators: the great cinematographer Barry Ackroyd, a Ken Loach and Paul Greengrass regular, who also shot *The Hurt Locker*; the editors William Goldenberg and Harry Yoon, who cut *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012); and the journalist-turned-screenwriter Mark Boal, who wrote both. It was during the pre-production stage that the team hit upon the idea of splicing period footage into the film's reconstructions. 'On my office walls there were about 1,500 stills from the time that I had placed in a narrative form from the early days of the riots to the culmination. We'd been combing through those, and all the film that had been shot, because there were so many people recording what was going on. At the same time, Barry chose these lenses that were vintage almost to that era; he adapted them to be used in our small digital cameras so you had the ease of digital, which was important as we were shooting night scenes in low light, but at the same time these vintage lenses gave the footage not just a grain but a patina which felt of that period. Intercutting our camera tests with documentary footage, we realised they could co-exist in the movie naturally and with integrity.'

Back in the late 90s, Bigelow undertook research and interviews in preparation for a film about another incendiary episode in US history, the Kent State shootings in 1970, during protests against Vietnam. Though that project didn't come to fruition, she agrees that its concerns fed into *Detroit*. 'If there is a continuity between the two, it lies in an interest in politics that goes back to my early days when I moved into film from 2D art. A political awareness began to inform the work from that point on.'

Did latter-day reports of police violence against African Americans in the US shape the nature of *Detroit*, even though the story was set in stone, or simply make it more pertinent? 'When Mark first told me about the Algiers incident, it was a week or two after the acquittal of the officer in the Michael Brown shooting [in Ferguson, Missouri],' she says. 'It was an emotionally charged time. What was important was not just the severity of the situation but how much further as a country we needed to go in order to heal and prevent these events occurring over and over. I have to admit that its sad and ironic topicality gave me the impetus to move forward on the film. Even though it's familiar to people inside Detroit, it's been kind of a secret for 50 years. As a culture we need to understand this inequity.'

Ryan Gilbey, *Sight and Sound*, September 2017