

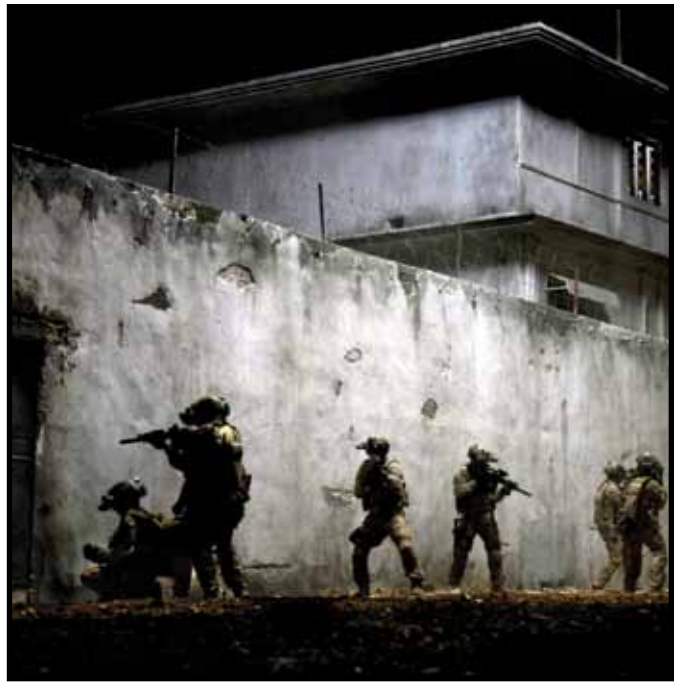
Movie Discussion Guide

ZERO DARK THIRTY

“The greatest manhunt in history.”

Chronicling the hunt for Osama Bin Laden post 9/11, *Zero Dark Thirty* is a riveting tale of dogged determination, violent interrogations, dead ends, dumb luck, betrayal, keen analysis and redemption.

Directed by Kathryn Bigelow, *Zero Dark Thirty* follows CIA operative Maya, played by Jessica Chastain, as she, over the course of several years, tracks down leads that ultimately leads to the raid that killed Osama Bin Laden. *Zero Dark Thirty* tells the behind the scene story of a defining moment in our country’s narrative.



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ZERO DARK THIRTY

Programming Suggestions

This discussion guide is designed to facilitate educational programs after viewing the film *ZERO DARK THIRTY*. Its purpose is to generate discussion based on social issues found within the movie and for program participants to reflect on themes that may be pertinent to them. Therefore, there are no “right” or “wrong” answers to questions in this guide.

The discussion facilitator may choose to utilize one of the following activities as a means of developing discussion:

- Make a bulletin board chronicling 9/11 and the subsequent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Include photos, images, art work, news articles and statistics related to the “War on Terror”.
- Invite a cleric and minister from the local Muslim and Christian communities to discuss how religion impacts viewpoint, politics and social culture and how 9/11 has changed how society views religions and their respective cultures.
- Invite faculty from Political Science, History, and Religious Studies to discuss the events leading up to the 9/11 terror attacks and the subsequent “War on Terror”. Have members discuss the historical, political, religious and societal perspectives that lead to differing viewpoints on these events.
- Create a timeline of events related to the 9/11 attacks, the “War on Terror” and the hunt for Osama Bin Laden. Post the timeline on a wall and have people write on the timeline their thoughts related to this moment in our history.

An important consideration in choosing any facilitation option is that all students have an opportunity to participate. Be aware that many of the topics addressed in the film are not often talked about in public settings. Students who attend the program may have varying degrees of comfort level with the discussion.

ISSUES

DEATH
RETRIBUTION
TERRORISM
TORTURE

Discussion Questions:

- Discuss how 9/11 impacted/changed our society. What other moments in our history have had such an important impact on our nation? Why?
- When 9/11 occurred, various parts of the world reacted differently. Discuss how different cultures have conflicting viewpoints on the role of the United States globally.
- After 9/11 the United States began two wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. What was the result of these wars?
- Are these wars viewed differently? Why or why not?
- How have these events impacted our daily lives? What has changed in your life time?
- Can the “War on Terror” ever be completely won? Is the “War on Terror” an actual war? Discuss.
- As the film begins Maya is introduced to “enhanced interrogations”. What are her initial feelings? Does this change over time?
- Do you feel this form of interrogation is right or wrong? Is it torture? Why or why not?
- Some people feel that without this form of interrogation Osama Bin Laden would never have been caught. Discuss your views on this.
- Do you believe that the United States should authorize this sort of treatment to terrorists or enemy combatants? Discuss.
- As the movie begins to unfold CIA Operative Dan tells a detainee “I’m not your friend. I’m not gonna help you. I’m gonna break you. Any questions?” He tells another detainee “ in the end, everybody breaks, bro. It’s biology.” Discuss these two statements. What does it say about Dan?
- Would you categorize Dan as a good or bad person? Is he a good person forced to do bad things? Are they bad? Are the practices he is using justified?
- How do you think history will judge both sides of the “War on Terror”?
- Do you think that it is the United States’ job to stop terrorism? What do you think other countries feel about our actions?
- Do the ends ever justify the means? Why or why not?
- As Maya begins to build a trail to Osama Bin Laden, she changes her clothing, her approach towards her work and how she works with her coworkers. Why do you feel that she is so driven?
- Can you think of a situation where you or someone you knew was driven towards a result? Discuss.
- Maya’s supervisor states at one point that catching Bin Laden was not important. How does she react to this? Do you believe that his death was symbolic or substantial? Did it change terrorism and the “War on Terror”?
- Maya’s close co worker, Jessica dies in a suicide bombing. How does this impact Maya? At one point she says that she feels God saved her so she could finish the job. She also says “I’m going to smoke everyone involved in this op and then I’m going to kill bin Laden.” Discuss these statements. Do you think that blind determination like this is productive? Does this sort of approach work in real life?
- As the CIA narrows in on Osama Bin Laden, it takes a long time for them to make the decision to authorize the strike. Did the United States drag their feet or were they prudent in their approach. Discuss.
- What would have been the dialogue if Osama Bin Laden had escaped before a strike was approved? What if it had not been Osama Bin Laden?
- Do you think that decisive action is best or is a cautious, measured approach ultimately the better approach towards complex situations?
- Discuss the raid that killed Osama Bin Laden. Did the Navy Seals act appropriately towards the people in the compound?
- At the end of the movie Maya boards a military plane and is asked by the flight crew where she wants to go. She begins to cry. Discuss where you think her life takes her after this?
- Can you think of the conclusion of a chapter in your life and how you decided on the next chapter?
- Was justice served? Can it ever be served?

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