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Director: [Stanley Kubrick](#) [See more](#) »

Writers: [Howard Fast](#) (novel) [Dalton Trumbo](#) (writer) [See more](#) »

Release Date: 7 October 1960 (USA) [See more](#) »

Genre: [Action](#) | [Adventure](#) | [Biography](#) | [Drama](#) | [History](#) [See more](#) »

Tagline: They trained him to kill for their pleasure. . .but they trained him a little too well. . . [See more](#) »

Plot: The slave Spartacus leads a violent revolt against the decadent Roman empire. [Full summary](#) » | [Full synopsis](#) »

Awards: Won 4 Oscars. Another 4 wins & 9 nominations [See more](#) »

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Spartacus

BY ROGER EBERT / May 3, 1991

At the time of its first release in 1960, "[Spartacus](#)" was hailed as the first intellectual epic since the silent days - the first Roman or Biblical saga to deal with ideas as well as spectacle. Even the ending was daring. The crucified hero is denied a conventional victory, and has to be consoled with the hope that his ideas will survive.

Seen three decades later in a lovingly restored version, "[Spartacus](#)" still plays like an extraordinary epic, and its intellectual strength is still there. But other elements of the film have dated. The most courageous thing about it, from today's standards, is that it closes without an obligatory happy ending, and an audience that has watched for 187 minutes doesn't get a tidy, mindless conclusion.

The film tells the story of the Roman slave Spartacus (Kirk Douglas), who toils for the Roman Empire while dreaming, the narrator assures us, "of the death of slavery - which would not come until 2,000 years later." He is sentenced to death after biting a Roman guard, but spared by [Peter Ustinov](#), as Batiatus, a broker of gladiators. Spartacus is trained in the arts of combat at Batiatus' gladiatorial academy, where one day two powerful men and their wives arrive from Rome. The spoiled women ask to be entertained by the sight of two fights to the death, and Spartacus is matched with a skilled black gladiator ([Woody Strode](#)), who spares him and is killed.

The notion of being forced to fight for the entertainment of spoiled women enrages Spartacus, who leads a slave revolt that eventually spreads over half of Italy. Leading his men into battle against weak and badly led Roman legions, Spartacus stands on the brink of victory before his troops are finally caught between two armies and outnumbered.

All of this takes place against a backdrop of Roman decadence, and we become familiar with the backstage power plays of the senate, where Crassus ([Laurence Olivier](#)) hopes to become a dictator at the expense of the more permissive and gentler old man Gracchus ([Charles Laughton](#)). There are also sexual intrigues; Gracchus is a womanizer, and Crassus a bisexual who is attracted to a handsome young slave ([Tony Curtis](#)) but is also driven by the desire to win the love of the slave woman Varinia ([Jean Simmons](#)), who is the wife of Spartacus.

The movie was inspired by a best seller by Howard Fast, and adapted to the screen by the blacklisted writer Dalton Trumbo. Kirk Douglas, who produced the film, effectively broke the blacklist by giving Trumbo screen credit instead of making him hide behind a pseudonym. The direction is by the 31-year-old [Stanley Kubrick](#), who realizes the ideas of Douglas, Fast and Trumbo but cannot be said to add much of his own distinctive style to the film.

I've seen "[Spartacus](#)" three times now - in 1960, 1967, and 1991. Two things stand up best over the years: the power of the battle spectacles, and the strength of certain performances - especially

Olivier's fire, Douglas' strength, and Laughton's mild amusement at the foibles of humankind. The most entertaining performance in the movie, consistently funny, is by Ustinov, who upstages everybody when he is onscreen (he won an Oscar). Some of the supporting performances now seem dated and the line readings stilted; dialogue such as "How will I ever be able to thank you?," delivered by a senator placed in charge of a legion, gets a bad laugh.

All historical films share the danger that their costumes and hairstyles will age badly. "[Spartacus](#)" stands at a divide between earlier epics, where the female characters tended to look like models for hairdressing salons, and later epics that placed more emphasis on historical accuracy. But the hairstyles of the visiting Roman women at the gladiatorial school are laughable, and even [Jean Simmons](#) looks too made up and coiffed at times.

Balancing against those dated elements are some that were ahead of their times, including a muted but sophisticated understanding of sexual motivation. Olivier's character becomes more complex in this revival than it was at the time, because of the restoration of a key scene, cut by censors, in which he and Tony Curtis share a bath together, and he confesses, "I like both oysters and snails," leaving little doubt where either is to be found as far as he is concerned. That brings his desire for [Jean Simmons](#) into focus: He wants her not merely to possess her, but as a form of victory over Spartacus.

The film has been restored by Robert A. Harris, the man who brought "[Lawrence of Arabia](#)" back to its original glory, and Harris has done a good job. The full 187 minutes of screen time has been pieced together from various shorter release versions; 10 minutes of opening, intermission and closing music is supplied; the color has been renewed by going back to the original materials and restoring them; the sound track is in six-track Dolby (although many theaters are equipped with only four tracks), and the 70mm wide screen picture reminds us of when movies filled our entire field of vision.

One aspect of the soundtrack is distracting: In the early days of stereo, movies such as "[Spartacus](#)" used the left track for characters on the left side of the screen, and the right track for those on the right, and then switched for the reverse shot - a disorienting auditory experience for the audience. Today's approach in surround sound puts the voices on the center channel and the effects on the side, a better approach.

Perhaps the most interesting element of "[Spartacus](#)" is its buried political assumptions. The movie is about revolution, and clearly reflects the decadence of the parasitical upper classes and the superior moral fiber of the slaves. But at the end, Spartacus, like Jesus, dies on the cross. In the final scene, his wife stands beneath him and holds up their child, saying "He will live as a free man, Spartacus." Yes, but the baby's freedom was granted him not as its right, but because of the benevolence of the soft-hearted old Gracchus. Today, that wouldn't be good enough.

Cast & Credits

[Kirk Douglas](#) Crassus: [Laurence Olivier](#) Varinia: [Jean Simmons](#) Gracchus: [Charles Laughton](#)
Batiatus: [Peter Ustinov](#) Julius Caesar: John Gavin Antoninus: [Tony Curtis](#) Black Gladiator: [Woody Strode](#)

Universal Pictures Presents A Film Directed By [Stanley Kubrick](#). Produced By Edward Lewis. Photographed By Russell Metty. Written By Dalton Trumbo. Based On The Novel By Howard Fast. Edited By Robert Lawrence. Music By Alex North. Running Time: 187 Minutes, Including 10 Minutes Of Curtain Music. Classified PG-13.

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Spartacus (1960)

reviewed by
Frank Maloney

SPARTACUS
A film review by Frank Maloney
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SPARTACUS is Stanley Kubrick's classic epic about a slave rebellion in republican Rome. It was originally released in, I think, 1960, to tepid reviews and packed houses. Of the *major* Academy awards (best picture, director, actor, actress) it was nominated only for best picture; in all it won four Oscars, including Best Supporting Actor for Peter Ustinov. Despite its cold reception from the Academy, it was the biggest money maker of its release year.

On May 3 a restored SPARTACUS was released in several U.S. cities, including Seattle. I played hookey from work and Lyndol and I spent three-and-a-half happy hours on a glorious spring day in the dark of one of Seattle's largest houses watching a SPARTACUS that was even more wonderful than it was when I saw it first-run at the age of 15 or 16. I hope you get a chance to see this, the second greatest epic Hollywood ever made (LAWRENCE OF ARABIA being the greatest by most, and my, accounting).

One of the reasons it is better this time around is it includes a now-famous scene where Crassus (Lawrence Olivier) makes a pass at his body-slave Antoninus (Tony Curtis). The story is that Olivier insisted that the scene be filmed even though Kubrick and the others knew that the scene was unreleasable, so the soundtrack was never recorded. For the restoration, the scene was found in tact in the three-color separations used to reconstruct the negative (the original negative having long since been allowed to disintegrate); Curtis dubbed his dialog by pitching his voice higher and Anthony Hopkins dubbed Olivier's dialog seamlessly. The scene is fascinating in its delicacy and indirection, its talk of having appetites for oysters or snails or both, as an historical footnote on the presentation of homosexuality in the films. More importantly, in terms of the overall film, it goes a long ways toward filling out Curtis's character as well as his sudden appearance among the volunteers joining Spartacus and the other escaped gladiators on slopes of Mt. Vesuvius; I never really understood Antoninus before.

Another reason why SPARTACUS is better the second time around is that I am older and I understand the subtext now. As a teenager, I reacted merely to the spectacle. As an old fart, I now react to the theme of personal freedom that informs the entire movie. The script was written Dalton Trumbo, the great film writer who was blacklisted during the Red Scare of the late Forties. He had survived for years by selling scripts through fronts and by using noms de plume; I understand he actually was given a writing Oscar under an alias. He could not enter any studio in Hollywood. Meetings had to be held in private homes. Stanley Kubrick to his everlasting credit got tired of the hypocrisy, issued Trumbo a gatepass one day, and used Trumbo's real name on the screen credits. I tell you it gave me a catch in the throat to see the credit, to see "Dalton Trumbo" proudly, defiantly displayed in those huge 70-mm letters.

Just as the theme is human liberty, so the background of the film itself recapitulates the theme. Trumbo said he knew the studio wouldn't go for the obvious stuff like the scene mentioned previously and choked on the slight nudity and sex (Jean Simmons has two coy nude scenes that were highly controversial in their day with the Legion of Decency and other bluenoses), but he knew the studio execs weren't astute enough to understand the really controversial aspect of the film, its theme. This theme is just as resonant today as it was then when SPARTACUS marked the

"official" end of the McCarthy Era.

A third reason for liking SPARTACUS even more today is that no one makes these wonderful sweeping 70-mm epics today. Thirty years ago the budget originally called for \$12 million; you could not bring it in for under \$200 million today. Hollywood made a terrible choice when it turned its greedy back on 70-mm; the brilliant clarity of the medium brings tears to the eyes of a movie lover, the tears of pain and regret.

And these epic stars are no longer available either. Look at the cast: Kirk Douglas (Spartacus), Laurence Olivier (Crassus), Jean Simmons (Varinnia), Charles Laughton (Gracchus), Peter Ustinov (Batiacus), John Gavin (Julius Caesar), Tony Curtis (Antoninus), and literally a cast of thousands. Actors like Douglas and Olivier are more than equal to the challenge of the epic medium. Gavin was the weakest of the principals, but gosh he was handsome--what happened to him, old farts want to know. Jean Simmons was a marvel of strength and delicacy, a stronger version of Audrey Hepburn, who didn't find real strength until she became middle-aged. But the absolute treats are Laughton and Ustinov, who have two scenes together that ought to be required viewing for all interested in acting for the screen.

SPARTACUS was restored by the same team that restored LAWRENCE OF ARABIA, the restoration that sparked the current wave of restored classics.

This is more than recommended, this is required viewing.

--

Frank Richard Aloysius Jude Maloney

And now a note from the Moderator:

[The following information regarding Dalton Trumbo and the blacklist was published in a set of articles for Jewish Heritage Month and may be of some interest:

"Breaking the Hollywood Blacklist: The darkest chapter of the American entertainment industry was the years of the Hollywood blacklist. People accused of disloyalty to the government could not confront their accusers, but would suddenly find that nobody would hire them. Careers were destroyed by innuendo. One blacklisted writer was Dalton Trumbo. Before the years of the blacklist he was a successful screenwriters, but when his name appeared on the blacklist he could submit only very few scripts and then only under a pseudonym. Then in 1960 two major films were released with screen credit given to Trumbo under his own name. On both films the directors and the lead actors risked being blacklisted themselves by insisting to their studios that Trumbo's name appear in the credits in type no smaller than their own. When there was no fuss from the public, it was generally acknowledged that the blacklist was dead. The films were EXODUS and SPARTACUS. The directors were Otto Preminger and Stanley Kubrick; the stars were Paul Newman and Kirk Douglas."

And why Jewish Heritage Month? Well, Preminger, Kubrick, Newman, and Douglas were all Jewish. --Moderator]

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Spartacus (1960)

reviewed by
Duncan L. Cooper

SPARTACUS
Still Censored After All These Years
A film review by Duncan L. Cooper
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Preface

An abridged version of the following research document appeared in the Summer 1994 issue of Cineaste. I welcome comments on the document and on my proposal for an uncensored "Director's Cut" of SPARTACUS, at my email address: activist@clark.net. I would also be happy to participate in a discussion on the USENET groups rec.arts.movies.past-films and/or alt.movies.kubrick.
Duncan Cooper

Introduction

Follow-up research to my article "Who Killed SPARTACUS?" (Cineaste, Summer 1991) has revealed evidence that Universal Studios deliberately censored this film's explosive historical content in an effort to keep it within the confines of the implicitly established mass media limits of acceptable political discourse. Despite the vigorous objections of executive producer Kirk Douglas, director Stanley Kubrick and screenwriter Dalton Trumbo, Universal's unwillingness to confront prevailing political myths with historical reality resulted in the elimination of approximately ten sequences which fostered the hope that Spartacus' rebellion might actually have succeeded in destroying Rome. These cuts included a six second battle sequence titled "Battle of Luceria," a ten second map sequence titled "Battle Map-Metapontum," and a lengthier battle sequence titled "Battle of Metapontum," all of which depicted some of Spartacus' greatest military victories. Four additional sequences were also eliminated but later restored thanks to the determined resistance of the filmmakers and the opposition of the Catholic Church's Legion of Decency. Unlike the other conventional cuts imposed on the film by the studio censors for sex, violence and nudity, these political excisions were intended to reduce the film's main character to a primitive spontaneous rebel who never really had a chance and to suppress screenwriter Dalton Trumbo's vision of him as "a great military leader who for four years running defeated the finest legions and the greatest armies Rome could put in the field against him." For Trumbo, this relentless attack on what he termed the Large View of Spartacus, gave evidence of 'an obsession with the Small View ... as to almost represent a conspiracy, a vulgar conspiracy, to kill any distinction this film might have had.'

(1)

The Major Players

In his autobiography, Kirk Douglas described his conception of the historical Spartacus based on his reading of the Howard Fast novel:

"Spartacus was a real man, but if you look him up in the history books you will find only a short paragraph about him. Rome was ashamed; this man had almost destroyed them. They wanted to bury him. I was intrigued with the story of Spartacus the slave, dreaming the death of slavery, driving into the armor of Rome the wedge that would eventually destroy her." (2) According to Douglas's biographer, Michael Munn, "the film was first and foremost Kirk Douglas' vision" (3) and the film's star named himself executive producer precisely "to insure that the picture would be made

his way."(4) Recent comments by Tony Curtis have confirmed that Douglas was determined to give at least equal emphasis in the film to the love story as to the slave uprising. In fact disagreements over this basic concept led to the dismissal of the film's first director Tony Mann two weeks into production. However, in a recent interview with Douglas himself, the actor/auteur repeatedly stressed his own determination to also portray on screen "the story of a slave whose dream of freedom nearly overthrew the Roman Empire."(5) Special consultant on SPARTACUS Saul Bass has confirmed to this author that during the whole time he worked on the project there was never any doubt or wavering about this point in the minds of Douglas, producer Eddie Lewis, screenwriter Dalton Trumbo or any of the other members of the production company. (6) As the shooting of the picture came to a close all the key promotional materials produced for the film: the thumbnail plot summaries, the comic book, the historical pamphlet, the study guide, the souvenir book, the Soundtrack Album Program Notes, the coming attractions trailers, the Bantam paperback edition of the Fast novel ... all told the same story of a slave revolt against Rome which won victory after victory and all but overthrew the Empire itself. The film's director Stanley Kubrick also subscribed to Douglas's basic premise; but, in contrast to Dalton Trumbo (as well as Douglas himself) he believed that historical realism demanded a more complex and ironic slave story line. To accomplish this Kubrick proposed some far reaching plot changes while filming was in progress; but because of Trumbo's opposition, these changes were only adopted after major alterations. Finally they were eliminated from the script altogether, probably by the studio, leading Kubrick to virtually disavow the picture. In response to Michel Ciment's question as to whether there was any relationship between his interpretation of antiquity in SPARTACUS and his parody of the inauthentic Hollywood sword and scandal epics of the 1950's in A CLOCKWORK ORANGE, Kubrick replied:

"None at all. In SPARTACUS I tried with only limited success to make the film as [historically] real as possible but I was up against a pretty dumb script which was rarely faithful to what is known about Spartacus. History tells us that he twice led his victorious slave army to the northern borders of Italy, and could quite easily have gotten out of the country. But he didn't, and instead he led his army back to pillage Roman cities. What the reasons were for this might have been the most interesting question the film might have pondered. Did the intentions of the rebellion change? Did Spartacus lose control of his leaders who by now may have been more interested in the spoils of war than in freedom? In the film, Spartacus was prevented from escape by the silly contrivance of a pirate leader who reneged on a deal to take the slave army away in his ships. If I ever needed any convincing of the limits of persuasion a director can have on a film where someone else is the producer and he is merely the highest-paid member of the crew, then SPARTACUS provided proof to last a lifetime." (7)

Kubrick may have wanted more realism but Douglas's concept still had the makings of a tremendously exciting motion picture. However, Universal Studios head Edward Muhl had some very different ideas leading to what Trumbo described as "a basic conflict of opinion about the dimensions of Spartacus and his struggle, a conflict which has been in evidence from the earliest beginnings of the project." Originally Muhl never really conceived of SPARTACUS as a "spectacle" or "blockbuster" but rather as an intimate film costing between \$3 and \$4 million. A personal friend of Trumbo's and the man who officially broke the Hollywood blacklist, Muhl too wanted to make an exciting, historically accurate film. He was particularly fascinated by the struggles between the liberal and conservative Roman senatorial factions, transparent analogues to contemporary American politics, which the writer had injected into the script. But, as he told this author: "Deep ideas are nice to have in a picture. But what counts is audience appeal." In response to the Douglas concept of SPARTACUS, he remarked: "its understandable that Kirk would want to build up his own part but that's not what the picture was about," concluding: "We did what was possible under the circumstances.... You know that phrase, 'the art of the possible'." (8) His attitude probably hardened when late in 1959 persistent rumors of new Hollywood hearings by the House Un-American Activities Committee began to surface and when a full-scale right-wing attack on the film

began after it was revealed by Walter Winchell that blacklisted writer Dalton Trumbo was the author of the screenplay.(9) Thus, despite the fact that SPARTACUS was the first truly independent production bankrolled by Universal, in the end Muhl's cautious approach prevailed because he and the studio still held the trump card: the legal right to make the final cut.

The Battle For Control

Of course, every big-budget film like SPARTACUS is a compromise between the writer, director, producer and the studio which is providing the financial backing. However, in the case of SPARTACUS, so bitter did the conflict over the film's content become that Muhl only consented to speak with this author on the condition that the painful clash of personalities, now almost 35 years in the past, would not be discussed. According to Tony Curtis, "Universal was being so heavy handed about everything including production values.... SPARTACUS cost \$12 million and was the most expensive picture Universal had ever made. It ended up grossing \$14 or \$15 million but they were scared shitless at the time." (10) In his autobiography Kirk Douglas also complained about studio interference in several pictures including SPARTACUS which his production company, Bryna Films, produced with Universal's financial backing and distribution. He wrote: "THE LAST SUNSET is another example of how a studio operates. Universal insisted on controlling the production." (11) In the case of SPARTACUS Douglas was particularly frustrated with the elimination by studio censors of the famous Oysters and Snails Scene between Tony Curtis and Laurence Olivier because of its veiled homosexual references. However, according to Muhl, Universal watched the picture closely "because it needed watching." Universal appointed Marshall Green assistant director to keep a close eye on Kubrick while Muhl's right hand man, Mel Tucker, viewed all the dailies, worked closely with Eddie Lewis, conferred frequently with Muhl himself, and accompanied Kubrick to Spain, where many of the battle scenes were filmed, to keep the young director within budget. The picture went through sweeping changes during the editing process, particularly in the section between the beginning of the slaves' trek across Italy and the end of their victorious march at the seaport of Brindisium (see below). According to supervising editor Irving Lerner, the struggle over the final content of the film became so intense that Universal executives, in an unprecedented move, periodically came right into the editing room and ordered him to reinstate or delete individual scenes, overriding Douglas' instructions. As a result, a number of scenes, particularly those featuring Charles Laughton, went in and out of the picture several times. The process of arriving at a final cut on which Lerner, Douglas, Kubrick and Muhl could even temporarily agree dragged on for so long that Lerner was finally forced to walk off the picture in order to begin directing his own film, STUDS LONIGAN. (12)

The Lost Battle Scenes of SPARTACUS

The politically motivated cuts made during the editing obliterated the film's intended inspirational message and seriously undermined its claim to historical authenticity, both of which depended upon the inclusion of at least a few battle sequences depicting some of Spartacus' historic victories. As SPARTACUS editor Robert Lawrence told this author: "the idea [of shooting full blown additional battle scenes] was discussed, but it was never actually done" because the money was not forthcoming from Universal. According to Lawrence, purportedly there were fears that if the scenes of the early slave victories were too good, they would detract from the impact of the final battle. In fact, following the conclusion of principle shooting, on August 4, 1959 an agreement was reached between Bryna and Universal to film six days of these slave victory scenes in Spain as part of a total of twelve days of battle scenes at an estimated cost of half a million dollars. However, when Douglas came back with Trumbo's proposals for a large number of additional scenes to be shot in Spain, the deal was re-negotiated. The new agreement of October 21, 1959 called for a total of twenty-two days of shooting in Spain the following month at an estimated cost of nearly a million dollars. However, the number of days for battle scenes was cut down to six, enough to accommodate the final battle but not the early slave victories. Instead, Douglas had to fall back on the idea of a "battle map" described to Trumbo as a map "with some pictorial device superimposed

indicating the sequence of [a dozen important slave] victories ... during the march from Luceria to Metapontum." (13) However, the evidence suggests that the studio initially rejected the Battle Map concept in favor of a map without pictorial battles or superimposed descriptive titles. (14) According to SPARTACUS editor Bob Lawrence, "We had maps with battles and maps without battles because some people wanted one kind and some people wanted the other." Saul Bass was commissioned to design this alternate map and produced several different versions, "very elaborate at first, then later much simpler." Bass was told that his map was to be cut into segments to be used as inserts for a big montage containing marching and dialogue but no battles. However, in December 1959 a significant amount of battle footage did become available for additional battle scenes when the studio rejected the first version of the final battle filmed in Spain as "boring and conventional" and ordered a series of retakes featuring gory shots of severed arms, legs and heads. (15) As Bob Lawrence told this author, "We had hundreds of feet of battle footage [for additional battle scenes]. But some people wanted it in the picture and some people didn't." The following month a six second battle scene, the "Battle of Luceria," depicting Spartacus' first great victory, was inserted into the film following the first big slave march from Mt. Vesuvius to Luceria. (16) At the same time, following the Revised Final Screenplay the filmmakers apparently decided to go ahead with the Battle Map using the rejected battle footage from Spain as well as titles naming the sites of the great slave victories. (17) To this end they inserted into the picture a ten second sequence probably containing more Spanish battle scenes, titled "Battle Map-Metapontum," following the second big slave march from Luceria to Metapontum. (18) There is also some evidence suggesting that the filmmakers subsequently assembled a much longer battle montage using the Spanish outtakes which they intended to combine with Bass' map inserts. In a post-production scheduling memorandum dated February 12, 1960 to Ed Muhl, Mel Tucker, Eddie Lewis and Bob Lawrence, Editorial Department Chief Sid Lund requested that "In addition, the number, design and timing of the map inserts for the battle sequences should be finalized as soon as possible." Lund was working on five other pictures at the time and does not specifically remember this memorandum; but as he told the author, if his memo made such a reference, "then the facts at the time had to support it." Mel Tucker was more non-committal, asserting that although he had never personally seen such a battle montage on film, it was possible that the filmmakers did put one together but then decided not to use it, before a screening for the studio could be held. In fact, the evidence indicates that some time over the next two months the filmmakers decided to drop the battle montage concept and the Battle of Luceria in favor of inserting one major slave victory sequence between the Battle-Map Metapontum and the triumphal March Into Metapontum which followed. This sequence, for which composer Alex North wrote a pencil sketch score entitled "Battle of Metapontum," is cited in the post-editing April 13, 1960 Revised Music Notes with the annotation "NOT IN AS YET." (19) Regrettably, by the end of April the Battle of Metapontum had also been eliminated from the film. However, National Screen Service did complete work on a shorter six second version of the Battle Map Metapontum for the filmmakers just in time for the June previews. This version included the Bass map together with a series of titles, superimposed over scenes from the film, possibly those used in the deleted six second Battle of Luceria. SPARTACUS production assistant Stan Margulies, who oversaw the production of the battle map by National Screen, cannot recall whether these scenes consisted of marching or battle sequences. However, as he told this author, his inclination is that the titles represented the sites of Spartacus' important victories. (20) Composer Alex North devoted the first six seconds of his piece entitled "Metapontum Triumph" to the four crescendos which comprise the music for the Battle Map and which can still be heard today as the opening bars of the film's Overture. (21) However, after the previews the film was handed over to Universal and "the Metapontum Map" was eliminated as part of a whole series of 42 cuts and trims made by the studio, according to Muhl, "for content, not for length." With the cutting of the Battle-Map Metapontum the entire triumphal March Into Metapontum which followed was rendered practically meaningless and the last vestige of truth about the real magnitude of Spartacus historic achievements was eliminated from this film. The studio cuts might have met with more determined resistance from the filmmakers except for the fact that, with the exception of Kirk Douglas, all of

the other major players had departed for new projects and were (probably) unaware of what was taking place. Kubrick had returned to England to begin work on *LOLITA*, Irving Lerner was off directing *STUDS LONIGAN*, Bob Lawrence was in Spain making *EL CID*, and Dalton Trumbo was busy working on his next project *EXODUS*. Lawrence sensed that the picture was long even for first run theatres and might be cut by the studio. However, when he returned he was horrified to discover that, "All my notes, all the script notes: Gone. Gone. They were thrown out. All the trims, all the should-we-or shouldn't-we stuff, all the 'Stanley says hold onto it but Kirk doesn't like it'. All that kind of stuff, beautifully labelled and ready: Gone." However, composer Alex North was still on the scene and protested against the damage the cuts were doing to a number of his music cues. When he learned that additional cuts were being made he was infuriated and dictated the following scathing telephone message to Eddie Lewis:

"Since we spoke there have been additional cuts in Kitchen No. One, Forest Meeting and Luceria Camp [scenes]. This complete disregard and disrespect for me and for my contribution by persons not qualified in any artistic levels an insult to my abilities. The illogical picayune cuts force me to suggest you hire a butcher and remove my name from screen credits. With my background and reputation I do not intend to participate in amateur night." (22)

The Covert Censorship of the Film

At the same time that almost all of Spartacus' historically significant actions were eliminated from the film during the editing successful attempts were made to eliminate almost all the amplifying reactions to them as well. These cuts not only reduced the film's dramatic impact, in some cases they also seriously damaged its internal logic, as the following examples amply demonstrate.

- *SPARTACUS BARGAINS WITH THE PIRATE TIGRANES FOLLOWING THE BATTLE OF LUCERIA*. An added scene written by Trumbo as part of the retakes and originally inserted following the first big slave march from Vesuvius to Luceria, it contained the following lines addressed to Spartacus:

"Of course it pleases Roman vanity to think you're noble. They shrink from the idea that a slave can beat them. Keep on winning and they'll elevate you to the rank of a prince! ... The party of Gracchus is in difficulty because the Senate can find no one to defeat you. Therefore the party of Crassus delights in every victory you win.... But you---you can't actually believe you're going to win? With the endless armies Rome can muster against you? ... Surely you understand you're going to lose. You have no chance. The world is too small for you. Every power on earth will fight you. Even the enemies of Rome will turn against you if you show promise of success.... They'll butcher you to the last man, woman and child." (23)

A few days after this scene was shot it was shifted back in the film to just prior to the slaves' first battle on Mt. Vesuvius and as a result all the dialogue above was replaced with retakes or eliminated. (24) - *CAESER DISCUSSES THE BATTLE OF METAPONTUM*. The opening section of the scene in the Roman baths, this sequence contained the following dialogue referring to the Roman defeat at Metapontum:

Laelius: What news from Metapontum? Symmachus: Heralds are crying the news now. We lost nineteen thousand men including Commodius and all his officers! Laelius: Nineteen Thousand! ... It takes us five years to train a legion. How can this Spartacus train an army in seven months? There's something wrong. Something very wrong.

Eliminated from the film's first rough cut this sequence was restored as a result of an eloquent plea by Trumbo in his Report on *SPARTACUS*. Nearly cut again it survived to become the only specific reference to a major slave victory still in the film today. (25) - *SPARTACUS SPEECH TO THE SLAVES BY THE SEA*. A cutting sheet dated March 2, 1959 reads "dialogue out" in reference to Spartacus' lines:

"We've traveled a long ways together. We fought many battles. Won great victories. Now instead of

returning to our homes across the sea, we must fight again.... I'd rather be here, a free man among brothers, facing a long march and hard fight, than to be the richest man in Rome. Fat with food he didn't work for, and surrounded by slaves." (26)

The heart of Spartacus' speech to the slaves, these lines ultimately remained in the film despite the initial cutting order. But without the battle scenes to which they refer most of their impact was lost. -THE PANIC IN ROME. A sequence depicting defeated legionaries limping back into Rome while a terrified citizenry begins to flee the city, these scenes were meant to convey the historical fact that Spartacus' revolt reached such proportions that it precipitated a panic which led to the installation of a dictatorship, signaling the beginning of the end of Roman democracy. As a result of Trumbo's Report on SPARTACUS, this sequence was reinstated on the Present Edited Continuity of Completed Picture as one of the Added Studio Scenes to be shot as part of the retakes which were approved at the top level meeting of October 10, 1959. It showed up a month later on the Revised Music Notes of November 2, 1959 marked "SCENE MISSING," but apparently it was never shot. (27) - THE SENATE APPOINTS CRASSUS. A scene intended to follow the PANIC IN ROME sequence, it contained dialogue in which the Senate offers Crassus the command against the slaves and warns him that if he does not accept, Rome will fall to Spartacus - a prospect to which Crassus reacts with indifference. Shot, according to Trumbo, as part of the retakes, it was never used in the film. (28) - THE BALCONY SCENE. A scene which follows Crassus' assumption of power in which Gracchus tells an increasingly outraged Caesar, "This Spartacus has quite a talent when it comes to handling an army.... He's developed such a bad habit of winning that Crassus may not be able to cure him of it ... If Spartacus wins I intend to ask the Senate to emancipate his whole army." Eliminated from the film's first rough cut this scene was belatedly restored as a result of Trumbo's Report on SPARTACUS and went in and out of the picture several times. Its final elimination by the studio after the Final Preview, destroyed the whole motivation for Caesar's epochal defection from his mentor, Gracchus--- and republican democracy, to Crassus---and imperial dictatorship. (29) - THE ORIGINAL PROLOGUE. Part of the first rough cut flashback version of the film, this scene contained Crassus' long address to his staff officers on the eve of the final battle including the lines: "Nine Roman armies have been destroyed by Spartacus ... and our defeat will mean the fall of Rome." Cut along with the rest of Crassus' original speech when the flashback was eliminated, these lines were still considered to have enough audience appeal to be used as the opening scene of the film's trailer. (30) - SPARTACUS AND VARINIA'S LAST NIGHT TOGETHER. A scene in which Spartacus confesses his fear of impending defeat to Varinia:

Varinia: They've never beaten us yet.

Spartacus: No. But no matter how many times we beat them, they always seem to have another army to send against us. And another. Varinia, its as if we've started something that has no ending. (31)

The only specific statement in the film referring to Spartacus' series of brilliant victories which the censors apparently never attempted to cut, this scene represents the exception which proves the rule. The product of Trumbo's own growing uncertainty about the ultimate fate of the revolution, this scene's overall hopeless tone meshed too nicely with the studio's own hidden agenda to allow it to become a target for elimination, despite its unwelcome historical candor. - THE FINAL BATTLE. A crucial reaction shot from this sequence remains in the film, in which a visibly dazed and frightened Crassus heaves a surreptitious sigh of relief at the appearance of his allies, Pompey and Lucullus. (32) However, in contradiction to the filmmakers' express written intentions, the long and medium range rather than the closeup take of this shot was used, obscuring Olivier's brilliant performance during the picture's climactic moments and destroying the basis for his character's words and actions during the remainder of the film. (33) - CRASSUS WALKS AMONG THE SLAVE DEAD. This scene originally contained Crassus' lines expressing his shock and disbelief at the sight of the clearly evident love between the fallen slave men and women, a love which has banished their fear of death, transforming them into a force which he senses will ultimately prevail over the power of

Rome. The cutting of these lines without the author's knowledge during the initial filming of this scene provoked some of the bitterest charges of bad faith in Trumbo's entire Report on SPARTACUS. But despite his vehement protests, these lines were nevertheless excluded from the subsequent retakes. (34)

Despite these cuts a large number of scenes from the first half of the film presaging great military success for the slave army did survive through the Final Preview and beyond, including such scenes as Spartacus' Speech to the Gladiators upon their return to the gladiatorial school, Spartacus' Greeting To New Recruits on Mt. Vesuvius, Spartacus Bargains With the Pirate Tigranes (Second Version), Spartacus Confronts The Defeated Glabrus and Glabrus Reports Back to the Senate (see my article, "SPARTACUS - A Second Look," Cineaste, Fall 1974). Furthermore, a number of scenes from the second half of the film which built upon or recapitulated the great slave victories also survived, including such scenes as the slaves' Triumphal March into Metapontum, Caesar Discusses Metapontum, Spartacus' Speech on the Beach at Brindisium, Spartacus and Varinia's Last Night Together and the Balcony Scene. Together these scenes formed a veritable constellation whose outline portrayed the figure of Spartacus, the rebel slave who almost defeated Imperial Rome. However, the power source which illuminated this constellation was the Battle-Map Metapontum which encapsulated in six seconds the action to which the dialogue in these scenes referred. Thus, once the studio pulled the plug by cutting the Battle Map after the Final Preview, all the lights in the constellation went out and the filmmakers' underlying conception of the picture simply disappeared.

The Overt Negation of the Film's Message

Not satisfied with the elimination or neutralization of nearly all of the scenes which affirmed the idea of the Large Spartacus, the studio appears to have forced radical changes in key dialogue as well in order to make its message unmistakable. Thus, during the last days of 1959, a retake was done of the last scene between Spartacus and Antoninus in which the key historical question posed by this film is addressed:

Antoninus: "Could we have won, Spartacus? Could we ever have won?"
Spartacus: "Just by fighting them we won something. When even one man says 'No. I won't' Rome begins to fear. And we were tens of thousands who said it." (35)

But in the retake Spartacus replies in the negative, providing an explicit statement of the hopeless message which the film still delivers today:

Antoninus: "Could we have won, Spartacus? Could we ever have won?" Spartacus: "No.(!) That was the wrong fight. We were doomed from the beginning. But it was a beautiful thing" (36)

As Robert Lawrence, told the author, "this scene was redone because some people wanted the film to express this idea whereas other people wanted to express the original idea." (emphasis added) Possibly as the result of audience reaction, the original version of this scene was ultimately restored after the previews of June 1960. (37) But simultaneously a hastily revised version of the film's voiceover prologue was introduced with a new downbeat conclusion:

"Here [in the Nubian gold mines] under whip and chain and sun [Spartacus] lived out his youth and early manhood and dreamed the death of human servitude. The historians of ancient Rome have recorded the death of his dream, and the utter destruction of his life and all his hopes. Yet his name still lives. And the last vestiges of slavery disappear before our eyes. And the defeat of Spartacus has become the victory of man " (38)

Fortunately, this crushing repudiation of the filmmakers' entire historical conception of SPARTACUS ultimately failed to find a permanent place in the film; but only because, shortly before the Premiere, objections from the Catholic Church's National Legion of Decency forced the studio to restore the original version with a new upbeat opening placing the story "in the last

century before the birth of the new faith called Christianity which was destined to overthrow the pagan tyranny of Rome." (39)

Conclusion: For An Uncensored "Director's Cut" of SPARTACUS

In summary, de facto studio censorship reduced SPARTACUS from the tragic, but ultimately uplifting, historical epic that Douglas, Kubrick, Trumbo and even the Universal publicity department believed they were making, to a sad reflection from which all traces of hope for progressive social change had been eliminated. Even worse, all the deleted scenes from the picture which might have formed the basis for a full restoration were junked by Universal in 1975. Thus, although Stanley Kubrick and the SPARTACUS restoration team wanted to restore the full 202 minute June 1960 Final Preview version of the film, the best they were able to do was a shortened 196 minute version of the 199 minute July 1960 studio censored cut which was shown to the press.

Kubrick now reportedly feels the film is "better than he thought it was." However, the director has expressed no interest in going beyond the restoration to the reconstruction that is necessary to make a "director's cut" possible. Only such a Kubrick-designed and approved director's cut can legitimately express the filmmakers' real intentions in making SPARTACUS.

Such a director's cut of SPARTACUS would not be very difficult or expensive to produce, as the following sample outline of a reconstructed minimal "director's cut" indicates:

- The six second Battle-Map Metapontum depicting Spartacus' historic series of victories should be reshot and, together with North's accompanying music, overlaid onto some of the fighting scenes currently in the film. The completed scene should be inserted prior to the triumphal March into Metapontum. According to Saul Bass, this would cost no more than \$100,000 or approximately ten percent of the total cost of the current restoration.
- The Intermission could be moved back to follow the Metapontum Triumph to underscore Spartacus' initially victorious campaign.
- A battle montage using stills from the lost Spanish battle scenes, sound from the final battle, and the current intermission music, could be inserted, either as part of the intermission or just prior to the Battle Map Metapontum thus reinforcing the action implied by the Battle Map.
- Olivier's "nine Roman armies lines" which still appear on the film's trailer, could be reinserted into the Tent scene in place of Crassus' redundant lines: "Spartacus has every reason to believe that he has outdistanced the pursuing armies of Pompey and Lucullus."
- Several successive closeup versions of Olivier's anxiety filled reaction shots during the final battle could be reinserted

Were a "director's cut" to be produced along these or similar lines, then a far greater and more authentic version of this film may yet emerge into the light of day.

... ..

This essay is dedicated to the memory of Eric Orbom, 1960 Academy Award Winner for Best Art Direction, who lost his life in the effort to make the matte work in SPARTACUS state of the art. The struggle continues.

... ..

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[This article was announced as follows:

The research article "SPARTACUS: Still Censored After All These Years" has been placed on the rec.arts.movies.reviews newsgroup archives. The article documents how the filmmakers--Kirk Douglas, Stanley Kubrick and Dalton Trumbo--were intent on making a film about "a slave whose dream of freedom almost overthrew the Roman Empire," a much greater and historically more authentic Spartacus than the one which appears in the film we have today. The article also details how Universal Studios fought against this idea throughout the editing, how the filmmakers nevertheless produced a final version of the film which still projected their basic concept and which was shown at the final previews, and how the studio then completely suppressed their vision through a series of unilateral cuts made before the film was shown to the press and public. The author invites comments either to him personally at his e-mail address: activist@clark.net, or in the alt.movies.kubrick and rec.arts.movies.past-films USENET groups.]

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Spartacus (1960)

reviewed by
Wayne Citrin

SPARTACUS

A film review by Wayne Citrin

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As most of you know by now, SPARTACUS is a three-and-a-half hour restoration of a 1960 film directed by Stanley Kubrick. It concerns one Spartacus (Kirk Douglas), a gladiator-slave who leads a rebellion in the ancient Rome of 72 BC. There's romance (with Jean Simmons), and friendship (with Tony "I also taught da classics to da children of my mastuh" Curtis). All this is played out against a backdrop of intrigue between two powerful Romans, played by Laurence Olivier and Charles Laughton. Peter Ustinov, John Gavin, and Herbert Lom also play major roles as powerful Romans.

There are numerous problems with SPARTACUS, one of them moral, the rest or them dramatic. I'll get the moral one out of the way first. Big Hollywood epics, it seems to me, are the Roman circuses of our time. I felt very funny watching such an entertainment and, at the same time, disapproving of those decadent Romans. Perhaps the filmmakers actually intended to put the viewer in such a dilemma. Probably not.

The dramatic flaws are more easily addressed. There's nothing really special about SPARTACUS. As Stanley Kauffman put it in his New Republic review, it's "Product." This somehow isn't an accusation that could be made about LAWRENCE OF ARABIA (the film with which this restoration invites comparison). The romance, the sentiments, and even the grating background music, are all pure Hollywood, and the larger scale doesn't seem to make things any better. Even the big battle scene, which could have benefited from the larger scale, is surprisingly feeble.

SPARTACUS has two giants in it: Olivier and Laughton. But the words that the script puts in their mouths are so small and trivial that the actors shrink into insignificance. Laughton fares slightly better, due to his distinctive physiognomy, but Olivier is almost unrecognizable (and the part could have been played by anyone). Great actors really do need to speak great words, especially great actors playing great Roman patricians.

In its defense, one can say that SPARTACUS moved quickly. The three and a half hours passed lightly, and I rarely felt that the action dragged. However, if Hollywood executives feel that the heritage of Hollywood should be restored and brought to the attention of a new generation of moviegoers, I wish they would spend the effort on something not so overblown and yet banal as this film.

What films would I rather see revived and restored? Well, to test an idea of mine, I went and rented a film last night. It was also directed by Stanley Kubrick. It also stars Kirk Douglas. It's about half as long as SPARTACUS. The film is called PATHS OF GLORY, and watching it confirmed my feeling that it's the most perfect film ever made. At an hour and a half, it doesn't have a single unnecessary scene, and it's full of perfect film moments. Unfortunately, I know many people who have never heard of the film. MGM/UA would do the public a great service by striking a new print and re-releasing it, instead of forcing people to catch it on video or late-night TV. One PATHS OF GLORY would be worth three SPARTACUSes.

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Spartacus (1960)

reviewed by
Chad Polenz

Spartacus Chad'z rating: ***1/2 (out of 4 = very good) 1960 original version: not rated, 184 minutes [3 hours, 4 minutes] 1991 restored version: PG-13, 196 minutes [3 hours, 16 minutes] [drama] starring: Kirk Douglas (Spartacus), Laurence Olivier (Crassus), Charles Laughton (Gracchus), Jean Simmons (Varinia), Tony Curtis (Antoninus), Peter Ustinov (Batiatus), written by Dalton Trumbo, produced by Edward Lewis, directed by Stanley Kubrick, based on the novel by Howard Fast.

"Spartacus" embodies the spirit of the movies. It's an epic drama of noble heroes and evil villains with glamorous costumes and lavish sets, all strung together by outstanding acting. Not to mention the fact it was directed by Stanley Kubrick, one of the greatest directors ever, who manages to convey an important theme of humanism even through the film's commercialism.

The story takes place in 200 B.C. Rome, an era where some of the most important events in history took place. We meet a slave named Spartacus (Douglas) who cannot endure his position and starts single-handedly fighting the Romans until Batiatus (Ustinov), a recruiter of gladiators, discovers him and sends him to a gladiator training center.

The first act revolves entirely around Spartacus' training. The initial outlook is quite dark, both in design and in atmosphere. Douglas has few lines during his training sequence, so it is Trumbo's screenplay and Kubrick's direction that makes the film so interesting and moving.

Many things happen to define the oppressive mood, such as the terrible conditions the slaves are forced to live with while the Romans live like kings. Spartacus meets Varinia (Simmons), a beautiful slave woman with whom he is arranged, but cannot bring himself to treat her as the Romans treat him. "I am not an animal!" he yells, to which she whispers, "Neither am I."

Although little happens in terms of plot, a subtle romance develops between Spartacus and Varinia. Meanwhile, the tension becomes so thick and tight it's obvious something's got to give. When two couples of high authority visit the camp and pay to see a battle to the death, Spartacus is chosen, and is about to die when his opponent turns on the nobles instead. Spartacus then leads a rebellion and all the slaves escape, and he is finally able to be with Varinia.

But this not a love story, it is one man's passion for freedom. The only problem is the film's a bit too Hollywood for its own good. The actors put their heart into their roles, but the scripting seems a little flashy, as if these realistic characters were stuck in soap opera. The sets and the costumes are

beautiful, some of the most impressive I have ever seen, but at times it seems a little too glamorous. Kubrick tries to counter this by emphasizing the theme of freedom by detailing the contrasting attitudes of Spartacus against that of the elite Roman officials.

Laurence Olivier and Charles Laughton co-star as Crassus and Gracchus, two senators who have a subtle rivalry going on. Olivier's character is a perfect villain, he is hateable through his attitude alone. Gracchus is likable through his kind acts but there seems to be even room for more character development.

The film does not seem too concerned with telling a story so much as it is a theme. Douglas and Simmons' characters do seem to be in love, but only in a Hollywood manner. The battle of good (Spartacus' slave army) versus evil (Crassus' arrogance and oppressiveness) does add a good deal of suspense and adventure to the film, but not nearly enough. The ending is surprisingly bleak, but gives a sense of poetic justice and the ultimate love through self sacrifice.

"Spartacus" has all the makings of a classic film, but seems to be a bit bogged down by its own weight. As good as the film is, there's an even better, more artistic and thematic film underneath it that constantly cries out.

Please visit Chad's Movie Page @ <http://members.aol.com/ChadPolenz> E-mail: ChadPolenz@aol.com (C)1997 Chad Polenz

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