

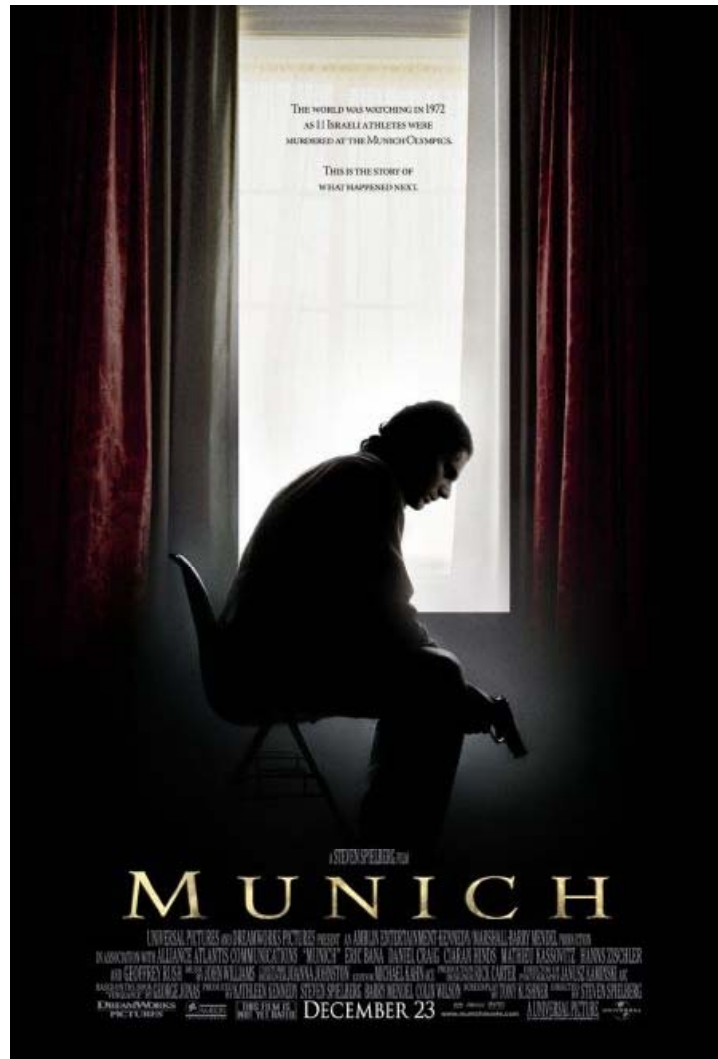
Munich Film Review:

“They’re All Gone”...Jim McKay

“The only blood I care about is Jewish blood”...Steve [Daniel Craig]

“Every civilization finds it necessary to negotiate compromises with its own values”....Golda Meir

The world was watching in 1972 as 11 Israeli athletes were murdered at the Munich Olympics. This is the story of what happened next...



During the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich, eleven Israeli athletes are taken hostage and murdered by a Palestinian terrorist group known as Black September. In retaliation, the Israeli government recruits a group of Mossad agents to track down and execute those responsible for the attack...Anonymous, IMDB.com



I went to see *Munich* primarily not because the subject matter, which interests me greatly, but because the subject matter interested Steven Spielberg. Without a question Spielberg, like Lucas, is a master of fantasy worlds and special effects driven films, but mastering dramas, romances and comedies are the only true cinematic challenges that can still even stop even one of the greatest directors dead in his tracks. But *Munich* is not like his other period piece dramas like *Amistad*, *Catch Me If You Can* or *The Color Purple* where the context to those films' stories was quite remote to today's fast pace and changing world.

No *Munich* hits you right in the gut because it documents the marriage of terrorism and mass media. World changed on 9/11 and ushered in a new age of global fear and military reprisal. But unquestionably back in September 1972 at the Summer Olympics the extremist Palestinian group Black September forced 900 million plus TV viewers worldwide to realize a new type of urban warfare had started. It took the death of eleven innocent Israel athletes for everyone to accept the fact that nothing beats live terrorism at a major media event. By 1972 TV had finally matured enough to allow the Munich masterminds of fear and propaganda to do what could not have been done--by merely attacking the state of Israel with suicide bombers or rocket attacks from Lebanon. Black September wanted the world to deal with them on their terms and not on an urban battlefield where they surely had no chance of winning.

So the story of *Munich* picks up with the question most asked by a country after a national tragedy is suffered: What next. After 9/11 it was inevitable that we were going to bomb Afghanistan back into the Stone Age. The fact that the Taliban had hijacked the Afghan country, taken over its leaders and was now sentencing millions of its citizens to pain, hardship and death was lost on the most simple fact. The Taliban was there and we had to have payback. It was the type of immediate media gratifying ass whooping that superior nation hands to a lowly infidel state. So too did the Israeli government after the Munich killings. Israel immediately sends its warplanes to blow up nearby Palestinian refugee camps that might or might not be harboring terrorists. In *Munich*, the Israel military leaders acknowledge that of the fifty that died in their airstrike on the camp was done as media relations ploy to show that killing Jews has a consequence. The lives of those that died are barely debated. But what was lost on the Bush Administration and not on Golda Meir's cabinet was the practical and methodical analysis that military solutions were not the real solutions to fighting terrorists. The Israelis decided that all those that planned and



aided and ebbled with the Munich incident should be hunted down like dogs and killed without a trial. The Israeli government also wanted certain terrorists blown up publicly to send another chilling message to the next generation of would be terrorism planners that a deadly fate like their leaders is what awaits them.

What allows Steven Spielberg to make *Munich* a great film of depth and compassion instead of a routine revenge thriller is because Eric Bana (*The Hulk*) as Avner is a highly relatable killer. We see Avner reluctantly taking the responsibility of being a paid and unsanctioned secret assassin for Israelis' Intelligence Service—The Mossad. Spielberg does not go into the inner workings of the Mossad, we just know who they are and how they operate by the way they trust Avner to complete this highly important mission. Avner's only true concern before becoming a state sponsored killing machine is the safety of his pregnant wife. Later on Avner fearing for her safety even has her move to the U.S. What is clear is that Avner is told to spread the lie that he is looking for Black September and willing to pay big bucks for names and addresses from supposedly "wealthy Americans". Using this lie actually comes back to haunt Avner and his team later in the film.

Avner seems content at first to carry out his deadly assignment as a loyal soldier. There is almost a warm and comforting manner as Avner and his caseworker The Mossad are shown going out of their way to make sure that no innocent civilians are killed in their Black September extermination operation. This is kind of far fetched when planning bombs in cars or hotel rooms. No public assassination can be guaranteed to be always nice and clean. I believe the Mossad was at that time more concerned about Avner or his men being caught at the scene of a bombing or shooting. But as the film progresses Avner is shown to appreciate and become deeply devoted to his task as an international Israel hitman. Spielberg alleviates Avner's initial moral qualms by strategically inserting flashbacks of the tragic Munich hostage taking. But these are not mere random flashback scenes, but rather Spielberg makes them always shown as nightmare that wakes Avner up in a pool sweat and anxiety. Avner stays on his mission because he is haunted by the deaths of eleven Israel athletes. He cannot get the athletes violent deaths out of his head. Nightmares are the prime psychological motivator keeping Avner focused on finishing what he started. Avner only begins to seriously doubt his Mossad missions when later on own team members are getting killed off in other violent and bloody assassinations. Their deaths make Avner fear for his life and his family's lives.



Avner is actually so good at his assignments that it is suggested by Ephraim that he give the Mossad the Frenchmen that is providing accurate information on the whereabouts of the Black September suspects and other high profile terrorists wanted by the Israelis. Avner is loyal to his country and the Mossad, but he is more loyal to the success of his mission. He knows giving up his French contact to the Mossad would severely compromise if not obliterate any chance of killing all the names on his hit list. By the middle of the film Avner was worked himself into believing that if completes his mission that he will be allowed to go back to a normal life with his wife and newborn baby girl. It is that misguided belief or dream and the constant nightmares of the real Munich that keep Avner an efficient and merciless killer. But eventually Avner's hopes and fears collide with the practical reality that although his government want the Black September leaders dead, there are other governments or intelligence agencies that wanted Black September protected. Spielberg even may raise ire of some conservatives by blatantly suggesting that our CIA was paying the renowned Muslim terrorist Ali Hassan Salemah (Mehdi Nebbou) \$100,000 to not attack U.S. Embassies or U.S. targets overseas. Spielberg goes further by showing a few undercover U.S. CIA agents even interfering with a planned hit on Salemah in London. And it was in London that a Dutch female assassin, posing as lonely and horny woman of the night, kills the first of Avner's team. Avner and his men become paranoid because they do not know if his team is being targeted because of Black September supporters, because they killed terrorists in Lebanon with the help of Israeli military or because they hurting civilians in a messy hotel bomb in Greece. The hit in Greece also killed Russian KGB agents and another rival militant leader. Avner's hitmen team, Hans (Hanns Zischler), Robert (Mathieu Kassovitz), Carl (Cyrian Hinds) Steve (Daniel Craig) in *Munich* were perfectly cast by Spielberg. They all except, Craig, have a non-heroic and rather ordinary appearance. Daniel is going to be the new James Bond in *Casino Royale* and he does look like a top mercenary or hitman. But during the missions his primary task is driving the getaway car. Spielberg does not give the audience lengthy explanations why these men are with Avner. You just know these men have pledged their lives to killing the enemies of Israel. Steve angrily says to the men, "The only blood I care about is Jewish blood".





Other noteworthy films about the Black September attack at the 1972 Munich Summer games are HBO's *Sword of Gideon* and Oscar winning documentary *One Day In September*. Spielberg should win best director. His greatest competition will be Ang Lee for *Brokeback Mountain*, Peter Jackson for *King Kong*, and Ron Howard for *Cinderella Man*. But *Cinderella* does not have the steam or hype going into the Oscars and *Kong* is unlikely to be nominated for best picture. If *Brokeback Mountain* sweeps the Golden Globes, then it will be a done deal of it sweeping the Oscars in my opinion. *Munich* has a legitimate chance to win best picture. I do not believe Eric Bana will automatically get nominated for best actor because of many other stronger choices. But if *Munich* gets a best pic nod, then it is highly likely Bana will get a nod as well. Nobody in 2006 has the remote chance of beating Russell Crowe for his gritty and humble performance in *Cinderella Man*. But doing films like *Munich* will only help Eric Bana position himself in the near future to win a best actor Oscar. I strongly recommend seeing *Munich* and I give it five cheesecakes out of five.

On a final note to *Munich*, one has to consider the whole Israel and Palestinian conflict and the deadly consequences of that conflict. I was fortunate in 2005 to see three great films dealing with the Middle East's greatest problem. I saw Eran Riklis's *Syrian Bride* and Raphael Najari's *Avanim* at the 2005 Los Angeles Film Festival and Josef Fares's *Zozo* at the 2005 AFI Film Festival and they examined the Israel and Palestinian subject from unique, personal and touching perspectives. There is no right or wrong in the situation. It just is what it is. Israel has a right to exist as a free, democratic state and the Palestinians equally deserve a homeland that is free and based on democratic principles. You can go back in history and see many examples of what happens when nations too land by force and forced its inhabitants to bow to their will. Every great nation can trace its sins to its origin in some unjustifiable manner that no one from that country ever wants to talk about. It is far too easy to condemn Israel's treatment of the Palestinians, military air strikes against them or even allowing Jewish settlers to take their land. Every super industrial nation, Australia, England, France, Germany, Japan, Russia and the United States, committed acts of unspeakable cruelty and crimes against some foreign land's native populations. One can find many historic perspectives to this end in excerpts from W.E.D Du Bois's June 5, 1944 commencement address delivered at the Talladega College, Talladega, Tennessee. Du Bois's speech was Jacob and Esau:

...“It was thus in the middle age and increasingly in the seventeenth and eighteenth and more especially in the nineteenth century, there arose the astounding contradictions: that is, the action of men like Jacob who were perfectly willing and eager to lie and steal so long as their action brought profit to themselves and their state. And soon identifying themselves and their class with the state they identified their own wealth and power as that of the state. They did not listen to any arguments of right or wrong; might was right; they came to despise and deplore the natural appetites of human beings and their very lives, so long as by their suppression, they themselves got rich and powerful. There arose a great, rich Italy; a fabulously wealthy Spain; a strong and cultured France and, eventually, a British Empire, which came near dominating the world. The Esaus of those centuries were curiously represented by various groups of people: by the slum-dwellers and the criminals who, giving up all hope of profiting by the organized state, sold their birthrights for miserable messes of pottage. But more than that, the great majority of mankind, the peoples who lived in Asia, Africa and America and the islands of the sea, became subordinate tools for the profit-making of the crafty planners of great things, who worked regardless of religion or ethics”...

...Karl Marx writes of Scotland: “As an example of the method of obtaining wealth and power in nineteenth century; the story of the Duchess of Scotland will suffice here. This Scottish noblewoman resolved, on entering upon the government of her clan of white Scottish people, to turn the whole country, whose population had already been, by earlier processes, reduced to 15,000, into sheep pasture. From 1814 to 1820 these 15,000 inhabitants were systematically hunted and rooted out. All their villages were destroyed and burnt, all their fields turned into pasture. Thus this lady appropriated 794,000 acres of land that had from time immemorial been the property of the people. She assigned to the expelled inhabitants about 6,000 acres on the seashore. The 6,000 acres had until this time lain waste, and brought in no income to their owners. The Duchess, in the nobility of her heart, actually went so far as to let these at an average rent of 50 cents per acre to clansmen, who for centuries had shed their blood for her family. The whole of the stolen clan-land she divided into 29 great sheep farms, each inhabited by a single imported English family. In the year 1835 the 15,000 Scotsmen were already replaced by 131,000 sheep...

...The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the Indian population, the beginning of the conquest of looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signalized the rosy dawn of power of those spiritual children of Jacob, who owned the birthright of the masses by fraud and murder...

...Of the Christian colonial system, Howitt says: “The barbarities and desperate outrages of the so-called Christians, throughout every region of the world, and upon people they have been able to subdue, are not to be paralleled by those of any other race, in any age of the earth.”...

...The treatment of the aborigines was, naturally, more frightful in plantation colonies destined for export trade only, such as the West Indies, and in rich and well-populated countries, such as Mexico and India, that were given over to plunder. But even in the colonies properly so called, the followers of Jacob outdid him...

...These somber Protestants, the Puritans of New England, in 1703, by decrees of their assembly set a premium of \$200 on every Indian scalp and every captured redskin: in 1720 premium of \$500 on every scalp; in 1774, after Massachusetts Bay had proclaimed a certain tribe as rebels, the following prices prevailed: for a male prisoner, \$525; for women and children prisoners, \$250; for scalps of women and children, \$250. Some decades later, the colonial system took its revenge on the descendants of the pious pilgrim fathers, who had grown seditious in the meantime. At English instigation and for English pay they were tomahawked by redskins. The British Parliament proclaimed bloodhounds and scalping as “means that God and Nature had given into its hands.”...

In the end the origins of all the world's super countries are not pretty or nice and neat. Historians now and in the future will be hotly debating if Bush had the right to invade Iraq that killed thousands U.S. soldier and thousands of innocent Iraqi civilians in the war and insurgent lead aftermath. We in the United States have no worldwide mandate to change the destinies of men and countries, but we will do so if it makes our lives easier. Which leads back to watching *Munich*. Historians then and now are hotly debating again whether Israel had the right to hunt down and kill men that had not been found guilty in any court of law in the world. All one can do is go back to what was said so poetically, powerfully and true by Israel's prime minister Golda Meir in *Munich* to justify hunting down and killing the Black September terrorists:

“Every civilization finds it necessary to negotiate compromises with its own values”....Golda Meir

By

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