

OUR WORDS ARE STRONGER THAN THEIR WEAPONS

# CITY OF GHOSTS



A FILM BY  
OSCAR® NOMINATED DIRECTOR  
MATTHEW HEINEMAN

21 SEPTEMBER

AMAZON STUDIOS PRESENTS WITH A&E INDIEFILMS AN OUR TIME PROJECTS PRODUCTION IN ASSOCIATION WITH JIGSAW PRODUCTIONS "CITY OF GHOSTS"  
EDITED BY MATTHEW HAMACHEK PAX WASSERMANN MATTHEW HEINEMAN MUSIC BY H. SCOTT SALINAS JACKSON GREENBERG CINEMATOGRAPHY BY MATTHEW HEINEMAN  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCED BY ALEX GIBNEY MOLLY THOMPSON MAIKEN BAIRD DAVID FIALKOW ELAINE FRONTAIN BRYANT STACEY OFFMAN ROBERT SHARENOW  
CO-PRODUCED BY JUAN CAMILO CRUZ MATTHEW HAMACHEK JOEDAN OKUN MAYA SEIDLER DIRECTED AND PRODUCED BY MATTHEW HEINEMAN

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VS | 2017 | 90 MIN | ARABISCH, ENGELS GESPROKEN | NEDERLANDSE ONDERTITELING



De film wordt uitgebracht door:

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VANAF 21 SEPTEMBER IN DE BIOSCOOP

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## SYNOPSIS

CITY OF GHOSTS volgt de campagne van de activisten van "Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently" (RBSS) die na de bezetting van hun thuisstad Raqqa in Syrië door de terroristen van IS samen kwamen om de gruweldaden bloot te leggen en te tonen aan de wereld. Regisseur Matthew Heineman, bekend van zijn Oscar® genomineerde documentaire Cartel Land, treedt binnen in de levens van de activisten en laat van heel dichtbij zien wat deze groep moedige amateurjournalisten en bloggers meemaken, wat het betekent om altijd op de vlucht te zijn, ondergedoken te leven en welke risico's hun onhoudbare strijd met zich meebrengt.

CITY OF GHOSTS is een indrukwekkende documentaire die van dichtbij laat zien wat er gebeurt in Syrië. Een must-see voor iedereen en een baanbrekend manifest over de kracht van moderne journalistiek.





## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

As I was traveling with my last film *Cartel Land*, the plight of Syria was becoming a near daily part of the news cycle. I almost obsessively began reading about what was happening with the so-called Islamic State. But I couldn't find an angle on the story. In the fall of 2015, I read an article about Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently (RBSS), a group of citizen activists who came together to document the atrocities that ISIS was committing in their hometown – dubbed the capital of the Islamic State. I was struck by the sacrifices that they had endured as a group, and I knew their story could provide an intimate, character driven window into life under ISIS.

I made contact with members of RBSS, attempted to gain their trust, and soon began filming with them. I knew almost immediately that I wanted the spine of the story to be deeply personal verité footage, captured as the activists escaped Syria after the assassination of several members by ISIS. I followed them in Turkey and then eventually to Europe as ISIS continued to threaten them.

I knew that I wanted to juxtapose this present day journey with the dramatic footage they had captured, and were continuing to capture, inside Raqqa. Since ISIS took over the city in March 2014, journalists have been unable to enter the region, allowing the caliphate to control the narrative of what is happening inside the city with its slick propaganda videos. So, RBSS's footage – including some that has never been released – provides

a unique, up-close, and visceral window into daily life in Raqqa.

The contrast of ISIS's videos, which proclaim a fully-functioning and prosperous state, with those of RBSS, which captured the dysfunction and violence of everyday life, is shocking. In a sense, it's a war of ideas, a war of propaganda, a war being waged with cameras and computers, not just guns.

Over the year that I spent with the group, I was surprised that the film became so much more than the chronicles of RBSS versus ISIS. The more I shot with them, the more the story twisted and turned into one that also touched on the immigrant experience, the strength of brotherhood, and one's haunting relationship with trauma.

And now America, Syria, Russia, Turkey, Iran, and local militias are poised to challenge ISIS in Raqqa in what may be a bloody and months-long military campaign. While this battle will surely be front-page news, there will be a no less important information war waged by groups like RBSS playing out on the ground, behind the scenes. It's this ideological battle for the hearts and minds of the next generation that may end up having the most lasting impact on the fight against terrorism.



# SUBJECTS

## AZIZ

Aziz is a co-founder and the spokesman for Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently. He is 25-years-old and currently lives in exile in Germany. Aziz grew up in Raqqa and was a biology student at Raqqa University. While in school, Aziz was active in the Syrian revolution and began organizing protests against Bashar Al Assad and the Syrian government. After ISIS invaded Raqqa in 2014, Aziz co-founded RBSS to report on the human rights abuses committed by ISIS in his hometown. As a result of his work, Aziz was arrested several times and was tortured while being detained. Under constant threat from both ISIS and the Assad government, Aziz was forced to flee Raqqa and eventually sought asylum in Germany. Now based in Europe, Aziz regularly speaks to the world press and has recently been a featured speaker at the United Nations, the German Council on Foreign Affairs, the Oslo Freedom Forum as well as various other foreign policy conferences to draw attention to the atrocities happening in Raqqa under ISIS rule.

## HAMOUD

Hamoud is a 23-year-old co-founder of Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently. While in high-school, Hamoud became active in the Syrian revolution and started filming the protests in the streets of Raqqa. He later embedded with the Free Syrian Army as they fought to liberate Raqqa from Assad's forces. When ISIS took over his hometown in 2014, he became a vocal critic of the terrorist organization and helped found RBSS. ISIS eventually put a bounty out for Hamoud and he was forced to leave Raqqa. After ISIS was unable to track Hamoud down, they instead arrested and assassinated his father, later publicly releasing a video showing the execution. A few months later, Hamoud learned that one of his brothers had also been assassinated by ISIS while another brother has disappeared. Now living in exile, Hamoud is determined to continue his work with RBSS. He recently became a father and named his first child Mohamed, in honor of his deceased father.

## HUSSAM

Hussam is a 27-year-old co-founder of Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently. Before joining the group, Hussam attended law school at the University of Damascus. However, he did not graduate as he left the university when the Assad regime began arresting students who were participating in the revolution. Hussam instead returned to his hometown of Raqqa and helped found RBSS. He reported several stories on the ground inside Raqqa and was once caught secretly filming an ISIS execution, only to be released when ISIS could not find the hidden footage on his encrypted phone. After eventually being forced to flee Raqqa with his fellow co-founders, Hussam now lives in exile in Germany where he continues to write and publish articles via RBSS's website and social media platforms on the abuses of Assad and ISIS.

## MOHAMAD

Mohamad is a 34-year-old reporter for Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently. Before joining RBSS, he held numerous jobs in Raqqa including being a member of the agricultural department, the director of the local council rescue, and a math teacher at a local school. While teaching, Mohamad learned that one of his students had been arrested and detained for criticizing the Assad regime on social media. That day, he decided to join the revolution himself and began reporting for local media outlets on the protests against Assad. He eventually joined RBSS as a reporter and was forced to flee Raqqa after ISIS took control of the city. Driven by his love of Raqqa and its people, Mohamad continues to be an active member of RBSS with the hope that he will one day be able to return to his beloved hometown with his wife, Rose.





## MATTHEW HEINEMAN

DIRECTOR/PRODUCER/CINEMATOGRAPHER/EDITOR

Matthew Heineman is an Oscar-nominated and Emmy-winning filmmaker based in New York. His film *CARTEL LAND* was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature and won three Primetime Emmy Awards, including Exceptional Merit in Documentary Filmmaking and Best Cinematography. The film premiered in the U.S. Documentary Competition at the 2015 Sundance Film Festival, where Heineman won the Best Director Award and Special Jury Prize for Cinematography.

The film was released theatrically nationwide by The Orchard in July 2015 and had its broadcast premiere on A&E in January 2016. Heineman won the Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Documentary Award from the Director's Guild of America for the film, as well as the Courage Under Fire Award from the International Documentary Association "in recognition of conspicuous bravery in the pursuit of truth." He was also named one of Foreign Policy Magazine's 100 Leading Global Thinkers of 2015. In addition, *CARTEL LAND* was nominated for a Gotham Award, Critics' Choice Award, and BAFTA Award for Best Documentary, and was recently presented with the 2015 Documentary Award by the prestigious George Polk Awards in Investigative Journalism.

Previously, he directed and produced a feature-length documentary *ESCAPE FIRE: The Fight to Rescue American Healthcare*. It premiered at Sundance 2012, won numerous awards at festivals across the country, and was released by Roadside Attractions/Lionsgate to critical praise in October 2012. The film premiered on CNN in March 2013, and was subsequently nominated for an Emmy.

Heineman collaborated for two years with a team at HBO on the groundbreaking, Emmy-nominated HBO series, *The Alzheimer's Project*, which aired in May 2009. He also directed and produced *OUR TIME* – a feature length documentary about what it's like to be young in today's America. Heineman has directed several short films and commercials and is in development on a few different projects.



## MATTHEW HAMACHEK

EDITOR

Matthew Hamachek began his career working on the Oscar-nominated documentary *STREET FIGHT* with Marshall Curry and went on to collaborate with Curry on three films including *IF A TREE FALLS* which won the Documentary Editing Award at the Sundance Film Festival and was nominated for an Academy Award in 2012. Hamachek also won the Documentary Editing Award at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival for *GIDEON'S ARMY*. He followed that with *MEET THE PATELS*. In 2015 he co-produced and edited *CARTEL LAND* which went on to be nominated for an Academy Award and win three Emmy awards. His most recent film, *AMANDA KNOX*, premiered in the fall of 2016 to critical acclaim.

## PAX WASSERMAN

EDITOR

Pax Wassermann is a film editor and producer with twenty years in documentary and fiction features. *CITY OF GHOSTS* is his second film with director Matthew Heineman, following 2015's Sundance prize-winner *CARTEL LAND* (also nominated for a 2015 Academy Award). His other work includes *DEVIL'S PLAYGROUND*, *PUSSY RIOT: A PUNK PRAYER*, *KNUCKLEBALL!* And *WHICH WAY HOME*, which was nominated for an Academy Award in 2009.

## H. SCOTT SALINAS

COMPOSER

Award-winning composer, H. Scott Salinas has contributed towards an impressive variety of notable projects including Bruce Lee action fable BIRTH OF THE DRAGON, Aaron Sorkin's smash hit The Newsroom, TNT's dark thriller Murder in the First, and the Oscar-nominated documentary film CARTEL LAND.

Along with accolades such as the prestigious Cannes Lion, Clio, BMI, and Turner Classic Movies Young Film Composer awards, Scott's accomplishments have earned him esteem and recognition as a highly versatile yet specialized talent.

## JACKSON GREENBERG

COMPOSER

Jackson Greenberg is a composer, singer, songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, and producer originally based in Los Angeles, CA. Jackson's recent film and TV work includes the Oscar-nominated and Emmy-winning documentary CARTEL LAND (soundtrack, Lakeshore Records), and two projects premiering at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival: CITY OF GHOSTS (Dir. Matthew Heineman), and HOT GIRLS WANTED: TURNED ON (Netflix, April 2017). Jackson received an undergraduate degree in music from Princeton University and a graduate degree in composition/scoring from Motion Pictures and TV from The Thornton School of Music at the University of Southern California.

## ALEX GIBNEY

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Alex Gibney is an American documentary film director and producer. Gibney has been called "the most important documentarian of our time" by Esquire Magazine and "one of America's most successful and prolific documentary filmmakers" by The New York Times. His previous work includes Taxi to the Dark Side, winner of the 2007 Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature, the Emmy-award winning Going Clear: Scientology and the Prison of Belief (2015), and Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room (2005), among others.

## MOLLY THOMPSON

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Molly Thompson is founder of A+E Networks' documentary feature production arm, A&E IndieFilms. Thompson has built a library of critically acclaimed, award winning titles including four Academy Award® nominated films, LIFE, ANIMATED (2016), CARTEL LAND (2015), JESUS CAMP (2006) and MURDERBALL (2005). She also serves as executive producer for documentaries produced under the History Films banner, such as the Emmy®-nominated BEING EVEL (2016), and for narrative features from Lifetime Films, including Eleanor Coppola's PARIS CAN WAIT (2016), starring Diane Lane and Alec Baldwin.

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