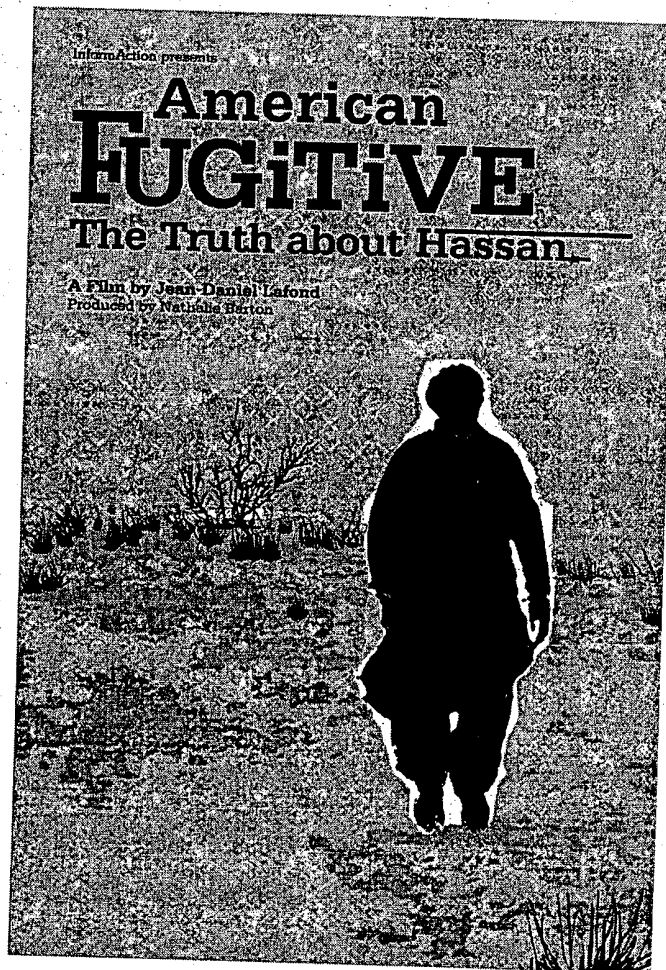




presents

AMERICAN FUGITIVE: The Truth About Hassan

A film by Jean-Daniel Lafond



From Washington DC in 1980 to Tehran today, the story of an unrepentant assassin: *American Fugitive* explores a troubled web of international intrigue and state-sponsored violence and provides rare insight into the soul of an articulate accuser with no place to go.

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AMERICAN FUGITIVE:

The Truth about Hassan

A Film by Jean-Daniel Lafond
Produced by Nathalie Barton
InformAction Films

Credits

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Digital Video, length: 75 minutes

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Researched, Written and Directed by JEAN-DANIEL LAFOND
Research Associate & Assistant Director FRED A. REED
Photography VAHID FIROUZ, ALBERTO FEIO, JEAN-DANIEL LAFOND
Sound NEZAM KIAIE, JEAN-DENIS DAoust, JEAN-DANIEL LAFOND
Edited by BABALOU HAMELIN
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International Distribution FILMS TRANSIT
Produced by NATHALIE BARTON

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Bio-Filmography of the Director

Born in France, Jean-Daniel Lafond is a former philosophy professor, a documentary filmmaker and a writer. He has written and directed over a dozen films that embody his commitment to creative documentary filmmaking: *Dream Tracks (Les traces du rêve)* (1986), *Le Voyage au bout de la route* (1987), *Le Visiteur d'un soir* (1989), *La Manière Nègre ou Aimé Césaire, chemin faisant* (1991), *Tropic North (Tropique Nord)*, *Freedom Outraged (La Liberté en colère)* (1994), *Haiti in All Our Dreams (Haïti dans tous nos rêves)* (1995), *Last Call for Cuba (L'Heure de Cuba)* (1999), *The Barbarian Files (Le Temps des barbares)* (1999), *Salam Iran, A Persian Letter (Salam Iran, une lettre persane)* (2001), *Le Faiseur de théâtre* (2002), *The Cabinet of Dr. Ferron (Le Cabinet du Docteur Ferron)* (2003), *American Fugitive: The Truth about Hassan* (2006).

A seasoned observer of the world and of our times, Jean-Daniel Lafond has crafted films that tell touching, though-provoking stories; philosophical poems that resonate with the call of the road, and mirror the fates of men and nations. Parallel to his involvement in cinema, he has developed an original body of work for radio and has also published several books. He is married to the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Governor General of Canada, and is actively involved in the activities of the office.

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Synopsis

When in 2001 Iranian director Mohsen Makmalbaf's feature film *Kandahar* was acclaimed in Cannes and shown around the world, the international press picked up on a surprising appearance. The film's African-American "doctor" was in fact a man called David Belfield, wanted in the United States for murder, and now living in exile in Iran.

AMERICAN FUGITIVE: The Truth About Hassan tells the story of this wanted man, an American — known in Iran as Hassan Abdulrahman—who says: "There is life after America." Through this story of an unrepentant assassin who openly accuses "the real culprits," another tale emerges: that of covert networks, international political manipulation, and state-sponsored violence.

In Washington D.C. in the summer of 1980, at the behest of Iranian intelligence, an African-American named David Belfield shot dead Ali Akbar Tabatabai, the former press attaché and representative of the Shah at the Iranian embassy. Tabatabai was thought to be involved in a plot to kill the Supreme Leader, the Ayatollah Khomeini, and topple the new regime.

AMERICAN FUGITIVE: The Truth About Hassan tells the story of a young African American's sudden awareness of race in the United States in the aftermath of the killing of Martin Luther King, and of his long-running personal confrontation with Uncle Sam that began with the Black Power movement of the 1970s and the rise of Islam in the United States. The confrontation continues to this day, as David Belfield alias Dawud Salahuddin alias Hassan Abdulrahman remains on the FBI's most wanted list.

Exiled in Iran for the last 25 years, Hassan is a sharp-eyed observer and first-hand witness to several of the events that have shaped relations between Islamic Iran and his native America. His story is also that of US domestic and foreign policies and their role in the Middle East crisis.

In **AMERICAN FUGITIVE: The Truth About Hassan**, we meet Americans who question their country's domestic and foreign policies and their impact on the conflict between the Western world and Islamic countries. Featuring interviews with Joseph Trento, an investigative journalist specializing in espionage, Gary Sick, who served on the National Security Council staff of President Carter, and the assassinated man's twin brother, the film raises grave questions about the convergence between Iran's conservative clerical rulers and their neo-conservative counterparts in Washington.

AMERICAN FUGITIVE: The Truth About Hassan provides rare insight into one of the most critical issues of our time, and into the soul of a man with no place to go.

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Director's Note

This is the story of Hassan, a Black American who, in 1980, in Washington, acting on a fatwa allegedly issued by the Ayatollah Khomeini, assassinated the Shah's representative to the United States, Ali Akbar Tabatabai. Since then, he has been wanted by the FBI and has lived in exile in Iran.

In Hassan's story, like many life stories, there comes a time when a crucial choice must be made: to stay and rot in "freedom" in Iran, or to face justice and prison in the United States while trying to explain his version of the truth, a version that raises more questions than it answers. In the wake of the events of September 11, Hassan's role in Mohsen Makmalbaf's film *Kandahar* sent a shock wave through the United States. Today, the face-off between the conservative authorities in Iran and the US government makes Hassan an irritant to all sides.

Approaching the truth of a character is a slow process, just as a character's ability to approach the truth of a film and the demands of another person's gaze comes slowly: trust must be earned on both sides. Before the shooting started, I had met Hassan on a number of occasions in Iran over the previous six years. Right from the start, our relations were frank and direct.

I was intrigued by Hassan's story precisely because he seeks neither to elude his past nor to evade his responsibilities. On the contrary, he takes full responsibility for his acts and choices; he accepts the consequences and indeed, agrees to bear the blame in the world's eyes, if not to his own mind. He has always said he was prepared to face his country's justice system.

Hassan's account unfolds alongside our investigation in the United States. The picture he paints is blurred by Joe Trento's revelations on the role of the secret services and Gary Sick's conjectures on the outcome of the 1980 hostage crisis at the US Embassy in Tehran. Suddenly, Tabatabai's assassination appears in a new light, murkier and more confused. Who did what and on behalf of whom? Who knew what about whom? Hassan's story brings the underside of history into full view. Beyond the drama that played out between the assassin and his victim emerges a portrayal that reveals a troubling aspect of relations between Iran and the United States over the course of the past 25 years.

Why did I make this film? Because cinema allows me to get closer to individuals, to their innermost beings, than might be possible if I didn't have a film to make. What drives my passion for making films is precisely the possibility of creating cinema at a human level. I am pursuing the pursuits of men and women, not the objects of their pursuits. That requires spending time with the person, patiently, moving closer to the other without becoming the other, in order to better gauge his or her place and role, while at the same time respecting the person's secrets. I wholeheartedly agree with Spinoza's maxim: "Neither laugh nor cry, but understand."

Cinema is my philosopher's staff. It allows me to advance, feeling my way along unpredictable paths, and especially, to share the journey for a while, the time of a poem, a point of view, a tale told, a thought, a sense of indignation, a feeling of torment, a moment of grace with the public.

To break the silence. Then to fall silent once more and set off on the road again. That is my vision of the documentary utopia: an insatiable quest for truth — the only struggle, in the end, that is worth it.

Jean-Daniel Lafond

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The Production Company

InformAction, founded in Montreal in 1971, produces single documentaries and mini-series on social issues, international affairs, art, world cultures and human rights. Many have won awards and all are distributed internationally.

InformAction produces on a regular basis for Canadian prime-time television (Radio-Canada, CBC, Télé-Québec, Canal D, TV5, Artv, Bravo) and has done several successful international coproductions, in particular with France. Several projects are currently in development with La compagnie des taxi-brousse.

Latest titles include **The Magic Touch** (3 G meaux Awards 2005, including Best Cultural Documentary), **Lifelike** by Tally Abecassis (Vancouver VIFF 2005, Hot Docs 2005, SXSW 2006), **East End Kids** by Carole Lagani re (Hot Docs 2004, Input 2005, Sheffield 2005, nominated for Best Documentary at the Jutra Awards and G meaux Awards 2005), **Alleycat Paradise** by Manon Barbeau (2 G meaux Awards 2005: Best Directing and Best Photography), **Le Deuil de la violence** by Olivier Lassu (in coproduction with Ampersand, France), **The Messengers** by Helen Doyle (Montreal New Cinema Festival 2003, Vancouver International Film Festival 2003, Visions du r el 2004, nominated at the Banff Television Festival 2004), **SoloLand** by Do na Harap (Rogers Documentary Fund core funding winner 2002, Montreal World Film Festival 2003), **The Moon and the Violin** by Carole Lagani re (Best Canadian Documentary, Hot Docs 2003) and **Salam Iran, a Persian Letter** by Jean-Daniel Lafond (G meaux Award for Best Documentary 2002). Recent coproductions with La compagnie des taxi-brousse include **The Shaman's Apprentice** by St phane B goin, **All They Need Is Words** by Alain d'Aix and **Bad Girl** by Marielle Nitoslawska.

InformAction was founded in 1971 by Alain d'Aix, Jean-Claude B rger and Nathalie Barton, who still run the company. Nathalie Barton, producer, was documentary representative and member of the Executive of the Association des producteurs de films et de t l vision du Qu bec from 1994 to 2002.

Press Cuttings

American Fugitive
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Official Selection

Hot Docs 2006 (Toronto)

International Documentary Festival of Marseille 2006

Festival du nouveau cinéma 2006 (Montreal)

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"A smartly balanced and probing documentary"
Geoff Pevere – Toronto Star

"A compelling portrait"
Brian D. Johnson – Maclean's

"A fascinating character study"
Jason Anderson – Eye Magazine
