



# I Am Spartacus!: Making a Film, Breaking the Blacklist

By Kirk Douglas

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**I Am Spartacus!: Making a Film, Breaking the Blacklist** By Kirk Douglas

**With a foreword by George Clooney:** From Kirk Douglas, Hollywood royalty and bestselling author of *The Ragman's Son* and *My Stroke of Luck*, comes the candid story of the making of *Spartacus*, the blockbuster film that broke the blacklist

One of the world's most iconic movie stars, Kirk Douglas has distinguished himself as a producer, philanthropist, and author of ten works of fiction and memoir. Now, more than fifty years after the release of his enduring epic *Spartacus*, Douglas reveals the riveting drama behind the making of the legendary gladiator film. Douglas began producing the movie in the midst of the politically charged era when Hollywood's moguls refused to hire anyone accused of Communist sympathies. In a risky move, Douglas chose Dalton Trumbo, a blacklisted screenwriter, to write *Spartacus*. Trumbo was one of the "Unfriendly Ten," men who had gone to prison rather than testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee about their political affiliations. Douglas's source material was already a hot property, as the novel *Spartacus* was written by Howard Fast while he was in jail for defying HUAC.

With the financial future of his young family at stake, Douglas plunged into a tumultuous production both on- and off-screen. As both producer and star of the film, he faced explosive moments with young director Stanley Kubrick, struggles with a leading lady, and negotiations with giant personalities, including Sir Laurence Olivier, Charles Laughton, Peter Ustinov, and Lew Wasserman. Writing from his heart and from his own meticulously researched archives, Kirk Douglas, at ninety-five, looks back at his audacious decisions. He made the most expensive film of its era—but more importantly, his moral courage in giving public credit to Trumbo effectively ended the notorious Hollywood blacklist.

A master storyteller, Douglas paints a vivid and often humorous portrait in *I Am Spartacus!* The book is enhanced by newly discovered period photography of the stars and filmmakers both on and off the set.

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## **I Am Spartacus!: Making a Film, Breaking the Blacklist** By Kirk Douglas Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #349232 in eBooks
- Published on: 2012-06-12
- Released on: 2012-06-12
- Format: Kindle eBook

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### Editorial Review

From Kirkus Reviews

He is Spartacus...and here's how it happened. Douglas (Let's Face It: 90 Years of Living, Loving, and Learning, 2008, etc.) famously helped break the Hollywood blacklist when he insisted Dalton Trumbo—previously jailed for contempt of Congress and made an unemployable industry pariah due to his membership in the “Hollywood Ten”—be given sole screenwriting credit under his own name for *Spartacus*, rather than employ a pseudonym, as was common practice at the time. That act of courage is at the heart of this memoir about the creation of the epic film. The author's evident pride in the matter is wholly justified, but the book's true appeal lies in the off-camera antics of the storied cast and the candidly described aggravation and terror the production's many complications engendered in Douglas, who, as the producer, had staked his reputation and financial well-being on the results. Among Douglas' many headaches were the childish rivalry between stars Laurence Olivier and Charles Laughton, who regarded each other with a curious combination of respect and utter hatred; the scene-stealing machinations of Peter Ustinov, whose efforts would net him an Academy Award; a scheduling standoff with a similarly themed sand-and-sandals epic starring Yul Brynner; and, most fascinatingly, Douglas' frustration with director Stanley Kubrick, a replacement for Anthony Mann who alienated Douglas and much of the cast and crew with his high-handedness and lack of social skills, while ultimately delivering a technically accomplished and viscerally emotional masterpiece. Douglas is a fine natural storyteller, unafraid to portray his quick temper and nasty outbursts when the going got rough. An entertaining and informative look at the troubled gestation of a film of both artistic and social significance.

### Review

“An entertaining and informative look at the troubled gestation of a film of both artistic and social significance.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

“Kirk Douglas is many things . . . But he is, first and foremost, a man of extraordinary character. The kind that's formed when the stakes are high. The kind we always look for at our darkest hour.” —George Clooney

"A glorious book . . . Kirk Douglas is a wonderful writer and a courageous one, which should surprise no one. Courage has been his battle cry all his life." —Steven Spielberg

"The making of *I Am Spartacus!* is a remarkable story told with the wit and charm of a great entertainer. Kirk Douglas revisits the complex political and social context surrounding the production of a cinema classic." —Henry Kissinger

"Hugely entertaining." —Liz Smith, *Chicago Tribune*

"*I Am Spartacus!* is a great read." —Bill O'Reilly

"Kirk Douglas is a lion." —Bill Maher

"A lively new memoir about one of [Douglas'] greatest triumphs." —*Los Angeles Times*

"Carries the power of a self-made man who continues to meet life on his own terms but with grace and

aplomb." —Associated Press

#### About the Author

Kirk Douglas is a renowned actor whose work on and off the screen has been rewarded by three Academy Award nominations, an Oscar for Lifetime Achievement, and the Medal of Freedom. Through his production company, Bryna, Douglas has produced acclaimed films such as *The Vikings*, *Lonely Are the Brave*, *Paths of Glory*, and *Seven Days in May*. He has penned ten novels and memoirs, including *The Ragman's Son* (1988). His 1960 epic, *Spartacus*, based on the Howard Fast novel of the same name, is credited with helping to end the practice of blacklisting film professionals who had refused to cooperate with the House Un-American Activities Committee. Douglas appeared in almost ninety movies before retiring from film acting in 2004.

In 2009, he starred in an autobiographical one-man show called *Before I Forget* at the Center Theatre Group's Kirk Douglas Theatre in Los Angeles. Douglas maintains an active life in Beverly Hills and Montecito, where he resides with his beloved wife Anne.

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