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# FILM FACTS

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GIALLELIS

## AMERICA AMERICA

AN ATHENA PRODUCTION. Released by WARNER BROS. Produced, Directed and Written by ELIA KAZAN; Based on his Book.\* Photography: HASKELL WEXLER. Music: MANOS HADJIDAKIS, Lyrics by NIKOS GATSOS. Production Design: GENE CALLAHAN. Editor: DEDE ALLEN. Sound: L. ROBINS, EDWARD BEYER and RICHARD VORISEK. Costumes: ANNA HILL JOHNSTONE. Makeup: EMILIO TRANI. Assoc. Producer: CHARLES H. MAGUIRE. Production Assistant: BURTT HARRIS. Filmed in Greece. 177 Mins.

Stavros Topouzoglou . . .	STATHIS GIALLELIS
Vartan Damadian . . . . .	FRANK WOLFF
Isaac Topouzoglou . . . . .	HARRY DAVIS
Vasso Topouzoglou . . . . .	ELENA KARAM
Grandmother . . . . .	ESTELLE HEMSLEY
Hohanness Gardashian . .	GREGORY ROZAKIS
Abdul . . . . .	LOU ANTONIO
Odysseus Topouzoglou . . .	SALEM LUDWIG
Garabet . . . . .	JOHN MARLEY
Vartuhi . . . . .	JOANNA FRANK
Aleko Sinnikoglou . . . . .	PAUL MANN
Thomna Sinnikoglou . . . . .	LINDA MARSH
Aratoon Kebabian . . . . .	ROBERT H. HARRIS
Sophia Kebabian . . .	KATHARINE BALFOUR

### Synopsis

Because the Greek and Armenian minorities are being persecuted in the Turkey of 1896, one young Greek named Stavros Topouzoglou decides he must seek liberty in America. His family presents him with all of their valuables and sends

\* Kazan's screenplay is based on legends within his family, which emigrated to the United States from Turkey.

him to Constantinople to enter a cousin's rug business. But he is robbed en route by a crafty Turk and he arrives penniless and half-starved. He then joins a group of insurrectionists and is seriously wounded when their headquarters is raided. After regaining his health, his determination to reach the U.S. becomes so overwhelming that he woos wealthy Thomna Sinyozoglou in the hope of obtaining the 500-pound dowry offered by her father. However, he is unable to go through with the marriage and he finally confesses to Thomna that his only interest in her was gaining the money necessary for passage to America. His next encounter is with Sophia Kebabian, a rich American with whom he has an affair in return for a boat ticket to New York. Her husband learns of the situation and swears that he will see to it that the immigration authorities send Stavros back to Turkey. But he is saved by a tubercular Armenian who slips over the side of the ship and drowns himself so that his Greek friend may take his name. And after his long and arduous journey Stavros—who has been nicknamed America America—reaches the land of his dreams and begins working for the day when he can afford to send for his family.

### Critique

THE N.Y. HERALD TRIBUNE. "A masterful motion picture—and much more than that. It is a human document and an historical one, human in its powerful detailing of a universal experience, historical in its brilliant depiction of the immigrants who are Americans. Mr. Kazan's hero is not a hero in the sweet-and-noble terms of history or ancestor-worship—for this is frankly a story of his forebears that Mr. Kazan is telling, in all the colorful and fierce and bitterly honest terms we have heard from the tellers of tales of our own past. Mr. Kazan has woven a rich tapestry of an embattled countryside, a teeming and vicious metropolis and a cosmopolitan and many-faceted society as background for the boy's adventures, a tapestry filled with faces and scenes—but above all faces—that are unforgettable. Stavros is glowingly portrayed by Stathis Giallelis. His every glance, his every motion reveals the gnawing aspirations of the soul. And the other performers are immaculate: Harry Davis, Elena Karam, Lou Antonio, Paul Mann, Linda Marsh, whose every gentleness glows with beauty—add every member of the listed cast and the scores of unnamed players to the list of perfections. In his script and in his direction Mr. Kazan has omitted no nuance of character or detail of time and place—and yet his story is so artfully constructed, so filled with the vitality of human affairs and climactic incidents, that it holds the attention for all of its three hours. This is a film devoid of sentimentality, of the mawkish reverence too often brought to bear upon the travelers to the promised land. A blend of the beauty



and the ugliness that is the fabric of life, honest and compassionate in its gauge of men and of their aspirations, *America, America* is a brilliant and powerful film." *Judith Crist* (12/16/63)

**SATURDAY REVIEW.** "Lengthy but vivid film. ...If this film were important for no other reason it would of course excite unusual interest because it is the first to have been conceived and written as well as directed and produced by Elia Kazan. As a director he is superb, and as a writer he has found his way to a naturalness and simplicity that would come very hard to a practiced professional. He has reached back to the tales told in his family and has retold them on the screen in a most convincing and affecting way. Perhaps the most amazing thing of all about what Kazan has done is that he never allows us for a moment to lose sympathy for Stavros. Such is the power of his dream, such are the nature of his adventures and hardships (and, it should be said, so unaffectedly does Stathis Giallelis play Stavros) that we can understand the hardening of his resolve. What is not so clear is the image Stavros has of the new country. Perhaps Kazan didn't want to dabble with such abstractions as 'freedom,' 'liberty,' and 'individual expression,' and he has implied only that for Stavros America was a place of hope. We want more substantial details of that dream. The others of the story are drawn more concretely. Kazan, who has interested us in his story throughout, manages to make it most moving during the voyage to America and in the first moments ashore. When Stavros stoops to kiss, not the soil, but a stone step that is leading to two years of virtual slavery as a shoeshine boy, Kazan brings new emotion to a worn-out symbol. Kazan has mingled American, Greek, and Turkish actors and has also collected a group of marvelous faces to add to the sometimes thickly exotic atmosphere. Lou Antonio and Paul Mann stand out, Linda Marsh is fine, Gregory Rosakis is eloquent. Some dubbing-in of the English voices of certain of the Greek, Turkish, and Armenian characters strains the reality of the sound track occasionally, but the annoyance is minor. The sound track also contains an excellent musical score by Manos Hadjidakis." *Hollis Alpert* (12/28/63)

**VARIETY.** "One of the outstanding motion picture achievements of the year, penetrating, thorough and profoundly affecting. It is a film of importance, one that provides us with necessary insight into our country. The film has flaws, but they are minor. Whatever little faults one may find with it are obliterated by one shining and distinguishing characteristic—it is honest to the core. As such, it should inspire critical acclaim and draw high praise from influential sources. Kazan wrote, produced and directed, all brilliantly. Perhaps never before on the screen has man's inhumanity to man been so graphically and painfully illustrated. Yet through it all, indomitable spirit survives—an inspiring thing to behold. As

noted, the film has its flaws. There is a vagueness about certain details and an element of confusion arises when Kazan goes somewhat arty in the latter parts of this film, but these are minor reservations. The acting is incredibly good. In the all-important focal role Stathis Giallelis, an unknown, makes a striking screen debut. His performance roots indelibly in the mind. He is a major addition to the ranks of young leading men and appears to have a bright future. But, conceivably, he might never top this performance, largely because it is quite possible he may never again be blessed with such a magnificent character to portray. The other players are just about equally superb. Virtually everyone is memorable, but perhaps the three most vividly remembered are Linda Marsh, Paul Mann, and Lou Antonio. No less skillful are the characterizations of Harry Davis and Elena Karam, Gregory Rosakis, Frank Wolff and John Marley, Salem Ludwig, Estelle Hemsley (she has one scene not easily forgotten), Katharine Balfour and Robert H. Harris. Haskell Wexler's cinematography is excellent, ranging from the most alertly intimate glimpses to great panoramic views in which the subject is a moving dot on the screen. His photographic textures and compositions are artfully designed. The long film never bogs down, and there is a minimum of dramatic confusion—a credit to the work of editor Dede Allen on a story so widespread in space and time. Gene Callahan's sets seem the very epitome of authenticity. Manos Hadjidakis has composed a rich and favorable score indigenous to the settings. Among the other fine contributions to Kazan's towering artistic achievement are those of costume designer Anna Hill Johnstone and sound mixer L. Robbins." *'Tube'* (12/18/63)

**THE N.Y. TIMES.** "Vivid, vigorous...not only a tribute but also a ringing ode to the whole great surging immigrant wave. An ode—that is what it is, precisely, for the story conveyed in this film is a minor odyssey that has the major connotations of a rich lyric-epic poem. And in it is packed by Mr. Kazan all the longing, frustration and ultimate joy of the tireless wanderer who seeks and finally finds his spiritual home. Furthermore, the narrative construction is achieved with images that have poetic flavor. They have strong black-and-white pungency, the excitement and tension of strident language, the power and shock of mighty words. Along with the truly epic strophes of Manos Hadjidakis's musical score, they develop an assault upon the senses that may leave one completely overwhelmed. One may also find one's senses exhausted by the sheer length and bulk of this film. The writer-director has been no less economical with the footage devoted to separate sequences than he has been with the miscellanea packed into the individual scenes. And his brilliantly visualized description of the youth's sad encounter with a Turk who shamelessly preys upon his innocence and robs him of the few possessions is as crisp and engrossing a sequence as anyone could wish. The movement begins to wax sluggish when Constantinople is reached. Mr. Kazan likewise gives too much attention to the shipboard experiences of the young man. And too much is made of the personal sacrifice a friend makes so the hero can get

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into the United States. The fine statement made by the picture doesn't need so much lush embellishment. But, for all that, the sentiment surges when Ellis Island is finally reached and Mr. Kazan catches the poetry of immigrants arriving in America. With some masterfully authentic staging and a fitly hard-focus camera, he gives us as fine an understanding of that drama as the screen has ever had. We must also be thankful to him for selecting a splendid cast to perform his colorful characters and for directing all of them so well. A Greek lad, Stathis Giallelis, is incredibly good, putting fire and spirit into the role, as well as a poignant revelation of the naivete and gentleness of the youth. Harry Davis and Elena Karam, Lou Antonio, Salem Ludwig, Linda Marsh, and Paul Mann are standouts in a cast that offers gemlike performances in even the smallest roles. If Mr. Kazan's pictures weren't so overwhelmingly long and, consequently, so often redundant, it would be — what? Even finer than it is." *Bosley Crowther* (12/16/63)

THE NEW REPUBLIC. "Elia Kazan's *America* manifests why he is an eminent director and why he is not a first-rank artist. There are so many lovely and flavorful and dramatic moments that it is a small surprise at the end to realize that the film falls flat. The chief flaw is a defective sense of proportion. He does not know when to condense and move on; if he sinks his teeth in a scene or a sequence that he enjoys, the audience can just wait around and be damned to it until he has worried the material in every way his warm invention can think of. Conversely, and possibly in reaction to this, he is sometimes so skimpy that he is unclear. The odyssey proceeds by lumps and flashes. As much as an hour of this three-hour film could helpfully be spared by major excisions and by many minor ones that linger over atmosphere, reactions, repeated visual patterns. Uncertainties both about expansion and contraction result from uncertainties of Kazan's original conception, abetted by various directorial self-indulgences. In addition, the film is afflicted with a damaging sound track. Considerable care has been taken to photograph in authentic locations; then a sound track has been tacked on that is damped with studio deadness. Besides, almost all the principal actors contribute flat American accents and voices in their Byzantine clothes and settings. Paul Mann and Linda Marsh are vocally credible

exceptions. Lou Antonio sounds particularly false. More care about aural planes and reality, more acute vocal casting and some judicious use of accents, would have kept the sound track from reminding us constantly that it was post-recorded. Nevertheless Kazan has made this film, which he wrote, with considerable genuine feeling. Aided by Haskell Wexler's excellent photography and Dede Allen's technically fine editing, he has captured what was one of the most dominant passions of the Western world for a hundred years and which has not been adequately rendered in films: the burning, almost manic desire to get to America. Despite the film's lags and *longueurs*, Kazan conveys it; and he has chosen well in Stathis Giallelis who plays the leading role with the right narrow-eyed hates, suspicions, obsessions. Forsaking, at least for a while, the artificial Steno heat of Tennessee Williams and William Inge, Kazan has made this film his most valid work since *On the Waterfront*. But as *Waterfront* was betrayed by a basic moral flabbiness, so this film is crippled by a basic artistic flabbiness. All through *America* we see opportunities that only a director of Kazan's talent could create. When it is over, we see that it was Kazan alone who fumbled them." *Stanley Kauffmann* (1/4/64)

TIME. "An affecting and dramatically dynamic idea that shapes up as one of 1963's more disappointing films... Director Elia Kazan, born in Turkey of Greek parents, wanted to tell the story of every immigrant who ever sought refuge from oppression on America's shores. But Kazan — perhaps from habit — does his own script a disservice, rendering it in bravura theatrical style as though all the world were indeed a stage... Kazan feelingly catches the poetry of peasants, which sometimes works against him because his native extras emanate an ancient sadness only hinted at by the professionals playing at stage center. Awkward dubbing mars the film too, for the disembodied voices on the sound track draw attention to themselves... Too often Kazan seems so intent on making his movie move that he dissipates pity and terror in orgies of cinema technique, restlessly blurring the action with camera acrobatics. The fault is that the slow hardening and corruption of character never becomes organic drama. Whatever he does, Stavros remains Horatio Alger in Constantinople, and the narrative lacks conviction." (1/3/64).