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Movie Club

A Touch of Evil (1958)

1. Quinlan is a corrupt cop, he plants evidence in crime scenes, he frames innocent people, he is also racist toward Vargas. What themes and opinions does Quinlan represent?
2. The opening scene is iconic, a three-minute long uninterrupted camera sequence that trails through the Mexican border town. What is the purpose of this scene and what does it set up for the rest of the film?

‘Orson Welles isn’t showboating here, by any means—he has sound reasons for constructing the sequence the way he does, and arguably passes up several opportunities to make it flashier or more technically impressive. It’s essentially a long, elaborate tease, very much indebted to Hitchcock’s notions about the nature of suspense.’ (Mike D’Angelo <http://www.avclub.com/article/touch-of-evil-71058>)

3. What do you make of the camera work which incorporates long shots?

‘The destinies of all of the main characters are tangled from beginning to end, and the photography makes that point by trapping them in the same shots, or tying them together through cuts that match and resonate. The story moves not in a straight line, but as a series of loops and coils.’ (Roger Ebert <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-touch-of-evil-1958>)

4. The film’s themes feel relevant to a contemporary audience: corruption, racism, borders etc. These concepts are still being tackled today. How do you see the film’s relevance to a modern audience?