“Darkness and A Blade: The Battle of Algiers in the Black Power Imagination”

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This talk will explore the rich history that existed between Algeria and the Black Power movement in the United States by centering on the role and place of film – specifically Gillo Pontecorvo’s 1965 epic masterpiece The Battle of Algiers – and the ways in which the film and decolonization in the Muslim Third World, became an ideological battleground for the Black Power movement in the United States. As a groundbreaking visual achievement, a flashpoint in anti-colonial politics, and the cinematic equivalent of Frantz Fanon’s Wretched of the Earth, The Battle of Algiers poetically captured the Algerian resistance against French occupation and colonialism and was profoundly influential throughout the world, but particularly within Black radical circles in the United States. Often invoked by Black internationalists in the U.S., including Malcolm X, Huey Newton, and others, the Algerian resistance and the film provided a lens with which to engage the politics of Blackness, the nature of resistance and representation, and the relationships of Islam and Blackness to Third World internationalism. This talk will explore how the film became an ideological battleground upon which to define and redefine Black culture, politics, aesthetics and the possibilities of liberation, and the ways in which ideas and figures from the Muslim International – such as Fanon, Malcolm X, Ali Lapointe, Djamila Boupacha, Nasser and others - informed debates about Black cultural politics, revolutionary aesthetics, and the role of cinema within liberation struggles.