

Cold turkey for Popeye Doyle

Sequels once meant *Escape from the Planet of the Apes* or *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls*—mindless fare which milked already thin plot lines for just a few more dollars at the box office. The trend still lingers—witness *The Trial of Billy Jack*—but a new one is emerging. Now the sequel strives for some kind of artistic uniqueness in its refinement of the first. Where *The Godfather Part II* was a clear success in such a departure from the original, *French Connection II* is more ambiguous, less daring and,

The French Connection—at the source of his thriving drug traffic. Doyle doesn't pretty up for the silvertongued French: hardnosed, profane and impulsive as ever, he snarls at his chief, Barthelemy (Bernard Fresson), "I'd rather be a lamppost in New York than the President of France." Popeye is so headstrong he can't see that he is just bait for Charnier, who picks him up, shoots him insensate with heroin for three weeks, then dumps him back in Barthelemy's lap, a junkie cop.

cinema
by Michael McFee
"French Connection II" starring Gene Hackman. Directed by John Frankenheimer. Produced by Robert L. Rosen.

hence, less successful than its Mafioso counterpart. The difference is one of scope: where Coppola enlarged on his initial vision of *The Family*, director John Frankenheimer of *French Connection II* has chosen to narrow his international heroin saga and focus on one person, the awkward finger on the pulse of the connection: Popeye Doyle (Gene Hackman).

Doyle has been shipped from New York to Marseilles to nab Charnier—the big one that got away at the end of

The cold turkey that follows, in a small, dirty, stone-block room, is the heart of the film and a triumph of acting for Gene Hackman. His ordeal is Doyle's, and Doyle's is his, and we are theirs. Here the focusing quality of the film is manifest, and the close-ups are relentless: Hackman writhing on the floor, Hackman belching and wheezing and guzzling cognac by a dingy sink, Hackman begging, "Hit my veins," Hackman sobbing in helpless desire. It is a sordid and uncompromising business, and Gene Hackman is convincing beyond doubt. It is his film-long unfolding of the character of Doyle, of the psychology behind the impulsive, gut-level response of the cop, that both carries and transcends the plot.

Once he recovers, the plot is predictable enough—revenge, pure and simple: kill Charnier. For some reason, perhaps pity, the French finally come around to Doyle's plan for trapping Frog One (as Charnier is called). There is a wait, fraught with uncertainty, a shootout at the heroin factory and, of course, a film-climaxing chase scene, which I found less electrifying than the original although definitely more exhausting.

I suppose this typifies what most people will look for in *French*



Gene Hackman, starring as the tough New York cop Popeye Doyle, again takes aim at Charnier, the international drug peddler who escaped him in *French Connection*. In *French Connection II* Hackman returns to the role which won him an Oscar in 1971, and, after a personal bout with heroin addiction, he smashes the drug source in Marseilles, France.

Connection II—the anxious moment through the crowds as the soundtrack mounts with tension, the foul-mouthed Popeye defying his abductors, the fires and the bombings and the culminating gunfights. And perhaps rightfully so, for the posters promise, as Hackman draws a bead on Frog One: "The French Connection was only the beginning. THIS IS THE CLIMAX."

A peculiar climax, though. Visually interesting, with photography by Claude Renoir, nephew of Jean Renoir (for whom he photographed *Grand*

Illusion). Well-acted, with Fernando Rey (as Charnier) and Bernard Fresson (as Barthelemy) turning in slick performances. Humorous and insightful in its brief vignettes of Doyle the American facing the cultural barrier. But as a whole, cold, confused and suspended somewhere between Popeye's mind and his fate. With this well-done sequel, director Frankenheimer takes an ambitious, perhaps a positive, step away from William Friedkin's original *French Connection*, but he never really puts his foot down.

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GENE HACKMAN FRENCH CONNECTION II

features

Greg Porter, Editor

Powell doubts we're 'First in Freedom'

by Elliott Warnock
Managing Editor

By July 4, 1775 Captain James Jack of Charlotte was on his way to Philadelphia with the so-called "Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence" and the Royal Governor of North Carolina had fled his palace in New Bern with hordes of howling rebels on his trail. But on the eve of America's year-long Bicentennial bash, UNC historian and author William S. Powell still insists the "Mec-Dec." never existed.

"There is no contemporary evidence that the Declaration occurred," states Powell. "I don't know the facts about it... because there are no facts."

Powell, chairman of the UNC American Revolution Bicentennial Committee, has a completely different view of Mecklenburg's actions in 1775 than those presented by Charlotte patriots last month in a celebration of the event.

John McKnitt Alexander, secretary for the Mecklenburg committee which supposedly drafted the declaration, was the only person who ever claimed he was present during the statement's conception, says Powell.

The declaration reportedly was a firm resolve on the part of Mecklenburg residents to expel the British government from North Carolina written on May 20, 1775.

Alexander claimed that all his notes of the declaration were burned when his house caught on fire, notes Powell, and it was not until years later that Alexander actually put a formal resolution on paper.

"On May 31st, 1775 they (the Mecklenburg committee) did meet and said they were taking over the state government, since the Royal Governor had fled," Powell says. "Why did they have to do that if they had already done it on May 20?"

The May 31 resolve was not as forceful as Alexander claimed the May 20 declaration to be. It was merely an assumption of power by Mecklenburg in the absence of the Royal Government. Powell says that the area newspaper in 1775 reported there was a meeting on May 31, and makes no mention of the May 20 meeting. "Everybody that talks about the Declaration says there was just one meeting, and there was: on May 31."

Before President Gerald Ford went to Charlotte last month to help the local citizens celebrate the "historic event," Powell wrote a letter containing his conclusions to the President. Powell received a reply from a presidential aide stating Ford would be careful in his remarks to the Charlotte crowd.

Ford was so careful, he never made a reference to the Declaration anywhere in his speech. Somebody should have told all this to Jerry Linker before he set out on horseback from Charlotte May 31 in a reenactment of Captain Jack's ride to Philadelphia. Jack had carried the Mecklenburg Declaration to North Carolina's delegation at the Continental Congress. The modern trip was scheduled to take 30 days, but when Linker stopped over in Culpepper, Va., he was arrested by the county sheriff and charged with overriding his horse. County Humane Agent Doris Ireland had sent the sheriff after Linker under the auspices of an old Virginia law.

While the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Bicentennial Commission traveled to Culpepper to get the matter straight, Linker grabbed a nearby Appaloosa and went on to Philly. Linker finally arrived at his destination, greeted by 1,500 people and a cannon salute.

Linker's ride is not the only Bicentennial activity happening in this area. A celebration marking the meeting of the Third Provincial Congress will be coming up next month in Hillsborough.

Powell is working on several exhibits and programs for the UNC campus: the most prestigious being a presentation of the musical "1776" by the Broadway company next January. Other activities include a photographic exhibit in Ackland Museum called "The American Situation, 1846-1976" and a symposium in the fall entitled "The Experience of Revolution in North Carolina and the South."

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