

**A24**

# A MOST VIOLENT YEAR

## PRODUCTION NOTES

### STARRING

Oscar Isaac, Jessica Chastain, David Oyelowo, Alessandro Nivola,  
Elyes Gabel, Catalina Sandino Moreno, and Albert Brooks

DIRECTED BY.....J.C. CHANDOR  
WRITTEN BY.....J.C. CHANDOR  
PRODUCED BY.....NEAL DODSON  
.....ANNA GERB  
.....J.C. CHANDOR  
CINEMATOGRAPHER.....BRADFORD YOUNG  
PRODUCTION DESIGNER.....JOHN P. GOLDSMITH  
EDITED BY.....RON PATANE  
COSTUME DESIGNER.....KASIA WALICKA-MAIMONE  
MUSIC BY.....ALEX EBERT  
SOUND DESIGNER.....STEVE BOEDDEKER  
SOUND EDITOR.....STEVE BOEDDEKER  
.....RICHARD HYMNS  
VISUAL EFFECTS SUPERVISOR.....MARK RUSSELL

**TRT 125 MIN | RATED R | ENGLISH | COUNTRIES: USA | COLOR**

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## SYNOPSIS

**A MOST VIOLENT YEAR** is a searing crime drama set in New York City during the winter of 1981, statistically the most dangerous year in the city's history. From acclaimed writer/director J.C. Chandor, and starring Oscar Isaac (**INSIDE LLEWYN DAVIS**) and Jessica Chastain (**ZERO DARK THIRTY**), this gripping story plays out within a maze of rampant political and industry corruption plaguing the streets of a city in decay. J.C. Chandor's third feature examines one immigrant's determined climb up a morally crooked ladder, where simmering rivalries and unprovoked attacks threaten his business, family, and above all his own unwavering belief in the righteousness of his path. With **A MOST VIOLENT YEAR**, Chandor journeys in a bold new direction, toward the place where best intentions yield to raw instinct, and where we are most vulnerable to compromise what we know to be right.

## ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

### **BEGINNINGS**

In the four years since his Academy Award nomination for *MARGIN CALL*, writer-director J.C. Chandor has established himself as a sophisticated storyteller and determined, formally audacious filmmaker. Each of his feature films – including the high-stakes financial thriller *MARGIN CALL* and the near-silent ocean survival epic *ALL IS LOST* – are built upon the notion of escalating crisis or meltdown, whether financial, professional, physical, or moral. Chandor invites us into the operating theater, where he cracks open the psyche of his characters: passionate, driven men, forced to exercise their skill in the face of narrow options and intense ethical quandaries. With his latest feature, the period crime drama *A MOST VIOLENT YEAR*, Chandor brings us once again to thresholds of danger and moral murkiness through the story of Abel Morales, an immigrant reaching for the American Dream in a city fraught with violence, corruption and decay.

*A MOST VIOLENT YEAR* plays out in and around the five boroughs during 1981 – then the most violent year on record for New York City. Coming off of the fuel crisis of the 1970s, the city underwent a dramatic transition from the booming metropolis of the 1920s through 1960s, virtually sputtering to a halt from budget cuts, soaring crime rates and political corruption. The dawn of the '80s was the peak of so-called "white flight" to the safety of the surrounding suburbs, as a new wave of immigrants flooded the boroughs in search of opportunity, dramatically changing the city's tenor and texture. Doing business in the epicenter of capitalism became fraught with tension and complexity; gone were the days of intricately established codes between City Hall, the Mafia and the business community. For small business owners trying to expand into an upper echelon of industry and commerce, it was a case of every man for himself.

*A MOST VIOLENT YEAR* follows three days in the life of Abel Morales (Isaac), a Latin American immigrant who, together with his Brooklyn-bred wife Anna (Chastain), is building a small heating-oil enterprise purchased from Anna's gangster father. Vowing to run the business legitimately, he discovers that the ladder to success is a crooked one.

At the film's outset, Morales puts down a deposit on a plot of land in Brooklyn tellingly, just across the river from Lower Manhattan, where global commerce to this day reigns supreme. On the property, existing fuel tanks will allow Abel to expand his company and gain a foothold over his competitors, a close-knit band of family enterprises scheming for a bigger share of the market. Tension mounts after thugs begin assaulting Abel's small fleet of drivers, stealing their fuel, and selling it to illegitimate markets. Meanwhile, a shadowy figure stalks the wintry grounds of the Morales' pristine new dream home in the tiny upstate suburb of Westchester. To make matters worse, an ambitious Assistant District Attorney (David Oyelowo) launches an investigation into the company's accounting practices, threatening indictments on tax evasion and fraud. At his most vulnerable point, scrambling to pull together the balance on the land deposit, Abel grapples with a moral decision that threatens to destroy the business he has built, and the life he has created with such calculation.

"Abel Morales is a guy who believes in the American spirit of Manifest Destiny," says producer Neal Dodson, who with Anna Gerb also produced Chandor's previous features *ALL IS LOST* and *MARGIN CALL*. "He's a guy who knows his path, who sets goals and sees his destiny in front of him — it's just a question of how he's going to get there."

Like Chandor's previous features, *A MOST VIOLENT YEAR* explores the gray areas behind the choices we make to get ahead, the compromises we accept to protect our families, and the ramifications of our decisions on the lives of others. Equal parts an intimate examination of one ambitious outsider transforming himself into an American business magnate, and an epic glimpse at a familiar metropolis enduring transitional change during a dangerous period, *A MOST VIOLENT YEAR* analyzes the cost of doing business in America, and the lengths some will go to achieve success on their own resolute terms.

"With Abel Morales, I was interested in exploring themes of ruthless individuality and self-reliance," says Chandor. "It's my belief that to actually succeed in this country there are certain things you can and cannot do. *A MOST VIOLENT YEAR* examines the limits of upward mobility as Abel ascends the ladder towards greater success." Adds Dodson: "Abel's journey is one of risk equaling reward. He puts himself in the most vulnerable position in order to reap the greatest rewards, believing that the moment you are the most scared is also the moment when you take the riskiest action — and potentially reap the greatest reward."

Coming off of universal acclaim for his breakthrough role in the Coen Brothers' **INSIDE LLEWYN DAVIS**, lead actor Oscar Isaac was drawn to **A MOST VIOLENT YEAR** by Abel's ambiguous nature and potential to descend into villainy. Over the course of the movie Morales is revealed to be a deeply complex and conflicted character — a family man with the potential to explode into violence when he's pushed closer to brink of professional ruin.

"Abel is someone who seems like a pacifist during a time in New York City history where it felt like the Wild West," says Isaac. "I saw him as a man of honor with gray areas. It was easy to envision him turning into a psychopath down the road. You see people ascending the professional ladder, running companies in which people are seen as products. These business leaders lose empathy over time, or they learn to compartmentalize their darker impulses. In Abel I saw an interesting juxtaposition: the wannabe hyper-capitalist desperate to attain the finer things in life who struggles with resorting to violence as a short-cut to grabbing the gold."

Producer Dodson likens Morales to a self-identified Rockefeller who hasn't quite reached the upper echelons of business and society, but who longs to enter them through honorable means. "In his mind, a Rockefeller doesn't pick up a gun and shoot his competitor or defend his family through violence and retribution like the heroes of so many crime dramas we've seen before," says Dodson. "A Rockefeller uses his brains — he uses strategy, business acumen and leverage. While there are car chases and foot races and shootouts on bridges in our movie, our main character — successfully or otherwise — is trying his best to resist the siren call of violence." Adds Chandor, "Abel doesn't feel that violence is the most effective way of getting business done. It's something he hopes he doesn't have to give into, a choice he chooses not to make — until his situation begins to escalate over the course of the movie. Will he give in and take the most expedient path or not?"

## **THE ORIGIN STORY**

For Chandor, the roots of **A MOST VIOLENT YEAR** began with a fascination for New York City in the year 1981, when the metropolis was a pressure-cooker on the verge of exploding. He also had a personal connection to the storied era in the form of several East Coast families that were friends of his parents or grandparents — people who had built small businesses like Abel's Standard Heating Oil into greater

entities, often grappling with similar triumphs or setbacks as they journeyed out of the start-up sector.

"Building a business from the ground up is probably what we do best in this country," says Chandor. "Creatively it's one of the most fascinating elements of who we are as Americans. But there is also a huge potential for failure." He was struck by the fact that most of these small businesses were small family operations built on years of struggle. Some succeeded while others did not. Through these familial stories he began envisioning a husband and wife trying to build an empire amid some of the toughest times in New York City's fabled history.

While researching the period, Chandor learned about a series of brazen hijackings in Manhattan's garment district in Midtown, where truckloads of fancy clothing ready to be shipped out and sold in the marketplace were routinely attacked by marauding freelance thieves.

"Heating oil struck me as this fascinating entry-level business that an immigrant like Abel could reasonably take on as a career, rising through the ranks with persistence and hard work," says Chandor. "Like the garment business, it's dependent on trucking for delivery. That sector is also intriguing because it holds the capacity for illicit business dealings. Unlike clothing, stolen heating oil is untraceable. Taking it from a competitor became in some ways the perfect crime, because if you mix the stolen oil with your own holdings, profits could increase exponentially."

Chandor's next step during the writing phase was to develop Abel Morales into someone who was determined to grow his business ethically in an era rife with crime and corruption. As an outsider driven to succeed — for whom failure is not an option — the character had to stand out from everyone around him, including his own spouse. Chandor made Abel an immigrant whose wife was his partner both romantically and professionally.

"I saw Abel and Anna coming from two very different worlds," says Chandor. "She controls the books in their company and her father owned the business before they bought him out. It probably wasn't a terribly successful business initially — maybe two or three trucks. But over the course of a decade the Morales' turn it into something substantial. In my backstory, I saw Anna's father as leading a more traditional kind of gangster lifestyle, where he might have relied on violence as a

means of collecting debts or putting pressure on enemies. Because he's raising a young family, Abel represented the opposite of this way of life — with Anna's help, he's managed to take the business to the next level in what he perceives is the right and just way."

Surrounding Morales is the consigliere-like lawyer Andrew Walsh (Brooks), who helps ferry him through the intricate machinations of a business world that at times feels Mafia-like in its reach, and the young truck-driver protégé, Julian (Elyes Gabel), who is attacked by thugs and dumped on an expressway in an early scene. But Chandor was most interested in exploring New York City's small business community across a melting pot of disparate ethnicities and social classes, including the Peter Forente character, a blue-blooded scion played in the movie by Alessandro Nivola, who is Abel's friend and competitor. Peter was born into the family business and works half as hard as Abel while reaping greater proceeds.

Chandor also wanted to explore the theme of upward mobility through both Abel and Anna Morales, who move into their modern Westchester dream home during one of the story's wintry opening scenes. "Despite disparate backgrounds, it was important that their business and personal relationships were meticulously entwined," says Chandor. "Abel and Anna have a vibrant and passionate relationship, but they're also very calculating with one another — and not entirely honest at times." During a pivotal scene, Anna forces Abel to hide the firm's accounting ledgers underneath their stunning new home during a visit from the Assistant District Attorney (Oyewolo), where Anna menacingly takes control of a threatening situation. As the story deepens in complexity and scope, Anna is revealed to be less than saintly and possibly even corrupt — leaving Abel to stand alone in a harsh and unforgiving world.

## **A CAST COMES TOGETHER**

The script was completed and casting began to fall into place over the course of three major film festivals in 2013, as Chandor began presenting his second feature, the Robert Redford-starring *ALL IS LOST*. At the Cannes Film Festival in May, Chandor found himself sitting behind Chastain at his own premiere. Already an ardent champion of *MARGIN CALL*, Chastain was doubly impressed with Chandor's gripping new feature, joining the crowd in a lengthy standing ovation. Between the Cannes festival in May and the Telluride festival in late August, where *ALL IS LOST* also appeared, Chastain read Chandor's latest script, expressing firm

interest in playing Anna Morales. Chandor promptly cast the prolific star, whose career had exploded in the wake of her Academy Award-nominated turn in Kathryn Bigelow's ZERO DARK THIRTY the previous year. Chastain introduced Chandor to the idea of her friend and former Juilliard classmate Oscar Isaac, who was just about to launch his career breakthrough with the Coen Brothers' INSIDE LLEWYN DAVIS. Chandor, Dodson, and Gerb met Isaac at the Telluride Film Festival and got on famously. By the time the New York Film Festival rolled around in October — both Chandor's film and the Coens' were in the program — Isaac had read A MOST VIOLENT YEAR and was committed to playing Abel Morales.

"I thought J.C. had written a very big story that was complex and dense in the way that you followed this particular character's story," says Isaac. "I liked how it took place over the course of a month during a unique and unusual time in New York City history. And it didn't hurt that I live in Brooklyn myself — I already had the city in my bones."

Chastain and Isaac had long wished to work together since crossing paths at Juilliard's drama program and staying in touch during the decade it took both of them to achieve stardom. For Isaac, a major selling point in A MOST VIOLENT YEAR was the intimacy Chandor brought out in the script between Abel and Anna Morales. "It really felt like a journey — like these people knew and understood each other, and could be at their ugliest together," says Isaac. "But there was always this sense of safety with them; they complemented each other in a good way. There was tremendous comfort in the fact that Jessica and I already knew each other."

For Chastain, the role provided a rich opportunity for playing a good wife and mother who harbors darker tendencies as a businesswoman. "I saw her as someone who loves being a woman, and who loves being married to a very masculine man," says Chastain. "But over the course of the movie she grows resentful towards Abel when business matters in their firm become complicated. She gets frustrated when things aren't handled in the way she deems necessary. She feels like she has to step up and take over that responsibility from her husband, compromising their close-knit marriage."

Chastain and Isaac convened privately prior to production to further develop their characters and gain deeper insight into what makes the Moraleses tick. "I felt all along that Abel and Anna loved each other very much — they're perfect for each other, to be honest," says Chastain. "But we wanted to find out more. Oscar and I

decided that they probably met in high school and then started a family, each playing their respective role. As much as they fight and have disagreements over the course of the movie, it only fuels their love and makes them stronger. At the end, you're left with the question of whether or not Abel has crossed a boundary in terms of the way he resorts to doing business and whether or not Anna in some way has changed him."

"Both of them fall into that category of the ten-year overnight success story, where an actor toils dutifully for years in the theater, on television or in independent film," says Dodson. "Three years ago Chastain had six or seven movies come out in the same year all of which she was brilliant in. It was a similar story with Oscar. He'd been in these great supporting roles in movies and theater and suddenly he's having his moment. So we felt enormously lucky to have them together on screen. Jessica really fought for Isaac to get the part, encouraging us to hire him. They are huge champions of each other's work and I think that was so important to the performances they give in the movie."

To further prepare for their roles, Chastain and Isaac both worked with dialect coaches. Chastain met regularly with a Brooklyn woman who helped her find Anna's thick boroughs drawl. "I'd listen to her talk by asking her questions and then we'd work back and forth to copy her voice," says Chastain. "In Anna's mind, she has no accent because she's dignified and longs for a higher station in life she believes she could hang out with royalty. There's an element to her that is all class, so I wanted to keep the accent subtle." She also realized Anna wouldn't pay attention to the crime statistics that figured so prominently during the era. "She lived in the suburbs of Westchester and had grown up where her father was a powerful man, so she was protected from any violence," says Chastain. "I don't think she was very fearful because she had never lost much of anything in life. She does have a kind of princess quality but it goes beyond that. She's been protected."

Casting was rounded out by a melting pot of stage and screen actors culled from home and abroad, running the gamut from industry veterans like Brooks and Nivola to British actor David Oyelowo (*SELMA*, *THE BUTLER*) as the A.D.A. Lawrence, and actor Elyes Gabel ("*Game of Thrones*," "*Scorpion*," *INTERSTELLAR*) as the hapless truck driver Julian. Academy Award-nominated Catalina Sandino Moreno (*MARIA FULL OF GRACE*) appears as Julian's wife.

For Chandor, the rich and diverse cast was a boon for the tough, often streetwise dialogue in *A MOST VIOLENT YEAR* that frequently recalls the classic urban dramas of Sidney Lumet. "My last film [*ALL IS LOST*] didn't have much in the way of dialogue, so it was wonderful to get back to working with actors talking again," says Chandor. "Talented actors going at it [verbally] is one of my favorite things to watch in a movie. The performances we got down the line were consistently fascinating."

For cast member Oyelowo — a member of the Royal Shakespeare Company in his native U.K. and a prolific face in American movies — *A MOST VIOLENT YEAR* was fascinating in its nuanced depiction of class mobility and how it fuels the American Dream. "I thought it was an intelligent dissection of what that dream actually is," says Oyelowo, who was born to Nigerian parents. "As a foreigner it's something I admire because if you're the son of a garbage collector, you could still feasibly grow up to become President of the United States. But the potential for class mobility has a dark side — it can breed a spirit of entitlement, not to mention criminality and materialism."

For an actor playing one of the characters who most vehemently threatens to take down Abel Morales' American Dream, Oyelowo found the piece to be a cut above typical crime dramas tracking an immigrant's rise through the ranks. "Our movie skates that fine line between celebrating ambition and hard work and understanding the allure of criminality that creeps in when times get tough," says Oyelowo. "It's like the classic gangster movie viewed through a different lens — not gangsters in a Mafioso sense but more like what happens when an average guy is put under enough pressure that he can contemplate or consider criminal activity."

## **DESIGNING NEW YORK CITY, 1981**

New York City at the dawn of the '80s offered immense cinematic potential for cast and crew in the form of a baroque urban decay, extending to everything from crumbling industrial space to graffiti-coated subway cars and big, bulky garments that seem to engulf its wearer, offering protection from attack. From a design perspective, it's what production designer John Goldsmith (*NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN*) describes as a tipping point for the city as much as the film's central character.

"One of the things J.C. wrote about Abel in our early correspondence was this notion of duality in the way he presented himself to the world, and what was behind that façade," says Goldsmith. "I started thinking about the spirit of those times and how it could be evoked through our settings. There was a great deal of decay in New York City in 1981. A lot of people were leaving the city. But there was also a kind of excess in what people wore during that era — flashy fabrics, big lapels. We wanted to explore the tension between luxury and decay and bring that out in our design."

The Los Angeles-based Goldsmith — who worked with Chandor on his previous feature *ALL IS LOST*, and who hails from the East Coast — jumped at the chance to shoot in New York City, where he had never filmed before. For research, he turned to vintage photographs from the likes of Carl Burton, who shot the tough streets of New York City in the '70s, and Dinanda H. Nooney, who spent the years 1978-79 photographing Brooklyn residents in 18 different neighborhoods. He also combed through Sears catalogs and architectural magazines from the period for additional inspiration. When it came time to scout locations, Goldsmith and location manager Sean Illnseher centered their focus on industrial sectors on the fringes of the city. Chandor's script described the large oil storage tanks as Richard Serra sculptures you can wander through. They also sought out crumbling outer-borough tenement apartments like the one belonging to the Abel's protégé Julian. Decay rules *A MOST VIOLENT YEAR* in scene after scene.

Goldsmith also collaborated at length with the film's costume designer, Kasia Walicka-Maimone, to get a better sense for how design could be incorporated into the production on as a reflection of the characters' inner lives — including everything from buildings and clothing to automobiles. "We were dealing with this couple who had great ambitions and who wanted to present themselves to the world as having arrived," says Goldsmith. "This shows through most of all in their sleek glass-and-steel Westchester home and their apparel. At the same time, their level of sophistication falls just short of what you might find in the pages of *Architectural Digest* or a fashion magazine."

A minute detail like Chastain's fingernails became an important design element for expressing the kind of fierceness underlying the Morales' otherwise composed façade. "There's something about when nails are super long — they leave you helpless and incapable of doing anything," says Chastain. "I thought they were a great way of indicating that Anna was the type of woman who was less interested in

being a caretaker for her family than some kind of leader out in the world. She has three kids but we don't see her do a lot of work in raising them, like cleaning the house or making their lunches. What I loved most about Anna's nails was how they left her incapable of doing anything because they were so long."

## **COSTUMING AN ERA**

For the film's costumes, Chandor turned to Kasia Walicka-Maimone, best known for her work on Bennett Miller's three features, in addition to Wes Anderson's *MOONRISE*. Walicka-Maimone arrived for the first meeting with a more subdued sartorial approach to the decade. To her delight, Chandor was on the same page. "He was extremely well-prepared for this movie, arriving with books and books of photographic images," says Walicka-Maimone. "I showed up with pretty much an identical set of pictures. We knew right away that we spoke the same language." While Chandor's sleek first feature was set in a contemporary investment bank, it was important to the filmmaker not to allow the costumes and production design to overshadow the more human elements of his latest feature, which centers on an immigrant striver. For *A MOST VIOLENT YEAR* the greatest aesthetic challenge was not getting mired in cliché period trappings of the 1980s. "I didn't want the movie to be some kind of camp walk through the hits of the era," says Chandor. "It's a story about people. And the clothing they wore and the places they frequent over the course of the movie simply become a function of that. That's what Kasia specializes in doing — she's a master of the light touch, finding a beauty in characters' garments without taking over the scene, so you can pay attention to the deeper themes. This also leaves space for the actors to shine."

One of Chandor's standout images was a man in a Barneys advertisement from the era wearing an immaculate suit. "It was a very classic suit, beautifully made," says Walicka-Maimone. "We knew right away that we had to re-construct the garment, so we made a variation on it, creating a double-breasted version with the incredible Brooklyn suit-maker Martin Greenfield Clothiers." Fittingly, the Bushwick-based manufacturer of traditional hand-tailored men's clothing — whose clientele extends to President Barack Obama — is a small-business owner whose career trajectory mirrors Abel Morales' own. Founding his company in 1977, Greenfield bought the 1917 factory from his former employer after working his way up from entry-level floor boy to his current status as the country's most exclusive and in-demand tailor. "He collaborated with us in the most incredible way," says Walicka-Maimone. "We

were able to source fabrics that don't exist in contemporary suit-making, featuring much-heavier fabrics."

Greenfield produced several suits tailored to Oscar's measurements that instantly looked iconic, epitomizing not only the specific era in which Abel functions in the movie but also the rigidity and steadfastness of the immigrant's struggle to succeed in the business world. "I always feel that costumes are the last layer of a character, not unlike their skin," says Walicka-Maimone. "The most fun part of costume design is exploring the openness and closeness of a character's garments, the tightness and the nonchalance as he or she navigates the world with the layer they happen to be wearing." Late in the film, Abel chases his nemesis through an industrial sector of Brooklyn wearing an immaculate camel wool coat that trails behind him in flight like a superhero's cape.

Other standout costumes in the film include a preppy Fila tennis outfit worn by Alessandro Nivola's character, Abel's more successful heating-oil competitor "This character lives an exquisite, high-end life and probably attended an Ivy League college, so we went a bit louder with his look," says Walicka-Maimone in addition to a collection of period-specific leather jackets worn by the thugs who attack the truck driver Julian, and the luxurious long, white Armani winter coat worn by Anna Morales in multiple scenes. What initially drew Chastain to the character was Chandor's meticulous vision of a type of woman who would emerge later in the decade as iconic blonde, bigger hair, long fingernails, exaggerated shoulder pads. Chastain, with Walicka-Maimone's expertise, knew that she had to rein in Anna's aspirational fashion tendencies, in keeping with the character's suppressed psychological motives. "It was really important that she have blonde hair but not the '80s stereotype where it's teased and frosted," says Chastain. "I wanted it to feel like Anna had gone to the most expensive salon in New York City to get her hair done. I wanted her to show money the best hairdo, the best nails, the best clothes to suggest that this way of life was something new to her. So maybe she overdoes it with things a bit."

No stranger to high fashion both on and off screen, Chastain already had a close working relationship with Giorgio Armani and his family, having worn looks by the Italian fashion house at awards ceremonies and red-carpet events. Chastain helped Walicka-Maimone's process by scheduling a meeting with Roberta Armani at the company headquarters. Lead actress and costume designer convened in Milan, combing the archives for early-'80s looks that would suit the look of Anna Morales.

Because the Armani name became synonymous with “power dressing” later in the '80s, it made sense that Anna would gravitate towards the iconic label in an aspirational sense." Anna is a person who is really striving to be a part of the American Dream — whatever she feels that is," says Chandor. "In the cars she drives, the clothes she wears, the way she carries herself — she's recreating what she thinks success is. This can be a fun thing to do for an actor, director or a costume department." Adds Chastain: "We got spoiled. The Armanis took very good care of us."

## PHOTOGRAPHING HISTORY

Louisville, Kentucky-born director of photography Bradford Young (PARIAH, AIN'T THEM BODIES SAINTS, SELMA, MOTHER OF GEORGE) jumped at the chance to work with Chandor after admiring his work on MARGIN CALL. "I was very much interested in the New York City during the early '80s, which is an infamous period in its history," says Young. "I liked that J.C.'s story was about decent people trying to do good things during a time when profit was beginning to consume people in a powerful way." From a visual standpoint, Young sought to avoid over reliance on conventional images of New York City, as seen in iconic '70s movies like TAXI DRIVER or THE FRENCH CONNECTION. "One of the things that was missing from both those films was the sort of elegance and refined quality of decay that the city was experiencing during that time," says Young. "What I wanted to achieve with this film was to frame the decay of that period in a much sharper and precise way."

One of the great challenges from a cinematography perspective is locating urban decay in an environment that has changed so dramatically over the past three decades. "It's tough to capture a city that's almost 180 degrees different from what it was during the time the story is set," says Young. "It's hard to find those funky little corners now. Some of that gritty residue and patina is no longer there. We had to alter our vision of a city we've seen so many times before — to change the lens on it and reframe the metropolis in a subtle and precise way." His main source for research was the street photography of Brooklyn native and former corrections officer Jamel Shabazz. "Jamel's work tends to be very magenta in terms of its hue — it's warm and creamy," says Young. "He captured marginalized subjects and heightened their sense of humanity by shooting them in a mindful way. I wanted to bring that same kind of textural quality to our movie — capturing a city in distress

and examining human beings under a similar duress, who seem to be holding on very tightly. When you put those two things together, it can be beautiful."

After reading Chandor's script, Young knew immediately that *A MOST VIOLENT YEAR* would be a true widescreen movie, and Chandor also wanted a movie with a wide, expansive feel. Young employed digital cameras, opting for a brand new 50mm master prime anamorphic lens from Arri for most of the shoot and favoring expansive, widescreen shots over intimate close-ups. "I felt like it captured the perfect balance of landscape and face," says Young, "The movie has a very disciplined, restrained feel to it. We tried to be mindful of architecture, structure and lines in addition to the symmetry of bodies against landscape."

## **A MOST FRIGID YEAR**

*A MOST VIOLENT YEAR* filmed over 40 days in Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, Staten Island, Long Island and Westchester, during one of the harshest winters in New York City's history, with temperatures dipping below freezing levels for much of the shoot and regular storms dumping drifts of snow on meticulously conceived outdoor sets. Initially, Chandor set his story during the summer months as a way of heightening its violence through the heat and humidity of a typical New York City summer. But when scheduling issues resulted in a winter shoot, Chandor hastily updated his story, adding gravitas to a central protagonist who is fiery to the core in his efforts to expand his business and obtain the American Dream. Cast and crew had to quickly adapt to a winter shoot — in some cases radically altering costume and production design.

No one involved in the production could have known that early 2014 would go down as the most brutal winter in memory, depositing 65 inches of snow on the city in the course of three months. "Dealing with the cold is one thing but it's tough when you're trying to make a movie amid five shifting weather patterns in a day," says Young. "It was a mental decathlon staying on top of things you have no control over. You can hide from the sun by putting up devices that block it on set, but we couldn't hide from the snow and freezing rain. This was the ultimate challenge. But the imperfections in weather only made our movie stronger because it legitimized the raw, truthful quality we wanted to convey. We were at the mercy of what was happening in front of us." Adds Goldsmith: "Weather was indeed our greatest challenge. You would plan for certain things to unfold during filming and they would be greatly affected by snow. We had to develop multiple cover sets at certain

times. But in the end I think the winter affected the movie in a positive way. Isolation is one of the larger ideas in the story — there's a kind of loneliness in the way that Abel and Anna are fighting on their own, and the snow greatly enhanced this. Scenes with figures alone in a snowy landscape — breath showing, hands in their pockets, shoulders hunched — these became some of the most memorable images in the film."

## ABOUT THE CAST

### **OSCAR ISAAC** (Abel Morales)

Born in Guatemala to parents of Guatemalan and Cuban descent, Oscar Isaac developed an early passion for music and acting while growing up in Miami, Florida. He studied drama at The Juilliard School in New York, where he trained with fellow-student and now co-star Jessica Chastain. Oscar has appeared in Ridley Scott's *ROBIN HOOD*, Madonna's directorial debut *W.E.*, Tony Gilroy's fourth installment of the Bourne franchise *THE BOURNE LEGACY*, and Nicolas Winding Refn's *DRIVE*. In 2013, Oscar brought his love of acting and music to his role as the titular character in the Cohen Brother's *INSIDE LLEWYN DAVIS*. His widely praised performance as a down-and-out performer in 1960s Greenwich Village earned him his first Golden Globe Nomination. In addition to his starring role in *A MOST VIOLENT YEAR*, Oscar's 2015 films include the Alex Garland sci-fi thriller *EX MACHINA* and J.J. Abrams' highly-anticipated *STAR WARS: EPISODE VII*.

### **JESSICA CHASTAIN** (Anna Morales)

Described as “one of the finest actors of her generation” by the late critic Roger Ebert, Jessica Chastain studied drama at The Juilliard School in New York before launching into her professional acting career. After several roles in television (*VERONICA MARS*, *ER*) and independent features (Jeff Nichols' *TAKE SHELTER*, Ralph Fiennes' *CORIOLANUS*), she captured audiences' attention in summer of 2011 with three widely-praised performances: in the espionage thriller *THE DEBT*, Terrence Malick's *THE TREE OF LIFE*, and the box-office hit *THE HELP*. Her supporting work in *THE HELP* as an unconventional, good-hearted Southern housewife earned Jessica her first Oscar nomination. In 2013, the Academy honored her once again with a Best Actress nomination for her masterful performance in Kathryn Bigelow's *ZERO DARK THIRTY*. Most recently, Jessica starred opposite James McAvoy in *THE DISAPPEARANCE OF ELEANOR RIGBY* and alongside Matthew McConaughey and Anne Hathaway in Christopher Nolan's latest film *INTERSTELLAR*.

### **ALBERT BROOKS** (Andrew Walsh)

Albert Brooks started his career in stand-up comedy before making his on-screen debut with a prominent supporting role in Martin Scorsese's *TAXI DRIVER*. His subsequent roles include the first husband of Goldie Hawn in *Private Benjamin*, Dudley Moore's cuckolded manager in *UNFAITHFULLY YOURS*, and his Oscar-nominated role as the acerbic, freely perspiring TV journalist Aaron Altman in *BROADCAST NEWS*. Albert also credits as writer/director on PBS-

documentary **REAL LIFE**, the angsty rom-com **MODERN ROMANCE**, and American odyssey **LOST IN AMERICA**. In 1994, he wrote and acted in the dark comedy baseball film **THE SCOUT**, and later directed, wrote and starred opposite Debbie Reynolds in **MOTHER**. After a temporary career hiatus, Albert returned to Hollywood, first appearing in Steven Soderbergh's **OUT OF SIGHT**, and then reassuming his position as a director-writer-actor hyphenate with **THE MUSE**, where he starred opposite Andie MacDowell and Sharon Stone as a struggling, uninspired Hollywood screenwriter. In 2003, Albert lent his voice to the lead clown-fish of Pixar's critically acclaimed, box-office hit **FINDING NEMO**. He later joined the cast of hit Showtime series **Weeds**, and went on to deliver one of the best performances of the year as foul-mouthed mobster Bernie Rose in the 2011 thriller **DRIVE**.

**DAVID OYELOWO** (A.D.A. Lawrence)

British-born Nigerian actor David Oyelowo began his professional career at age 24, when he was offered a season with Royal Shakespeare Company. In a landmark moment for theater, David was cast as King Henry IV, becoming the first black actor to play an English monarch in a major production of Shakespeare. David went on to take an assortment of small and big-screen projects including the Idi Amin biopic **THE LAST KING OF SCOTLAND**, Kenneth Branagh's HBO production of **AS YOU LIKE IT**, and the box-office hit **THE HELP**. His recent screen work has included both major studio tent-poles like **RISE OF THE PLANET OF THE APES** and provocative art films like the Palm d'Or nominated **THE PAPERBOY**. David's performances in two award-winning films Lee Daniels' **THE BUTLER** and Steven Spielberg's **LINCOLN** led to him being cast in his highest-profile role to date, as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in this year's **SELMA**. In addition to his winning performance in **A MOST VIOLENT YEAR**, David can also be seen in Christopher Nolan's **INTERSTELLAR** as well as **SELMA**.

**ALESSANDRO NIVOLA** (Peter Forente)

Alessandro Nivola began his acting career as an undergraduate at Yale, landing the lead role in a Seattle production of Athol Fugard's **MASTER HAROLD...AND THE BOYS**. After college, he made his Broadway debut as the young lover of Helen Mirren in "A Month in the Country." His breakthrough film role was in 1997 with John Woo's **FACE/OFF**, playing Nicolas Cage's paranoid schizophrenic brother. Alessandro went on to star opposite Rachel Weisz in **I WANT YOU** and continued to expand his range of work, appearing in the thriller **BEST LAID PLANS** and again as an Englishman in the screen version of the Jane Austen novel **MANSFIELD PARK**. In 2013, Alessandro landed a role in the outstanding, award winning ensemble of David O. Russell's **AMERICAN HUSTLE**. In addition to his role as corrupt business mogul Peter Forente in **A MOST VIOLENT YEAR**,

Alessandro can be seen in Selma and Zoe Cassavetes' upcoming DAY OUT OF DAYS.

**ELYES GABEL** (Julian)

Elyes Gabel began his acting career training at the Oldham Theatre and Northern Kids Theatre Company in the United Kingdom. He currently stars in CBS' new drama series "Scorpion," playing the lead role of Walter O'Brien and can also be seen in Christopher Nolan's sci-fi thriller INTERSTELLAR. Earlier this year, he wrapped the independent film SPOOKS, based on the BAFTA-winning television series. He previously starred in Paramount Pictures' WORLD WAR Z, opposite Brad Pitt, and WELCOME TO THE PUNCH, starring opposite James McAvoy. No stranger to television either, Elyes previously starred in "Body of Proof" for ABC, playing Detective Adam Lucas opposite Dana Delaney; HBO's "Game of Thrones," which received a 2012 SAG Nomination for Best Ensemble Cast; and Showtime's "The Borgias."

**CATALINA SANDINO MORENO** (Luisa)

Catalina Sandino Moreno made her screen debut as the title character in the critically acclaimed film MARIA FULL OF GRACE from Fine Line Features/HBO, for which she was nominated for an Academy Award. Sandino is also known for her work in THE TWILIGHT SAGA: ECLIPSE; CHE, opposite Benecio Del Toro, in the two-part biopic directed by Steven Soderbergh; LOVE IN THE TIME OF CHOLERA, alongside Javier Bardem and Benjamin Bratt; FAST FOOD NATION, directed by Richard Linklater; and PARIS JE T'AIME, the critically acclaimed ensemble film. Sandino recently wrapped a recurring role on "Red Band Society," and had a strong recurring arc on the FX drama "The Bridge," for which she received the 2014 Imagen Foundation Best Supporting Actress Award.

## ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

### **J.C. CHANDOR** (Writer/Director/Producer)

J.C. Chandor has honed his own subtle yet distinct narrative voice and vision over the past 15 years through directing, producing and writing award-winning documentaries, commercials and narrative films. He was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay for his debut feature film *MARGIN CALL*, which he also directed. The film was awarded 'Best Directorial Debut' by The National Board of Review, 'Breakthrough Director' by the New York Film Critics Circle, and won an Australian Academy Award for 'Best Screenplay.' The film received the 'Best First Feature Award' as well as the 'Robert Altman Award' at the Independent Spirit Awards.

In May 2013, Chandor premiered his second film, *ALL IS LOST* starring Robert Redford, at the Cannes Film Festival. The film went on to collect many accolades and was nominated for an Academy Award, a BAFTA, two Golden Globes, and four Independent Spirit Awards including, 'Best Picture,' and 'Best Director.' Chandor has feature film projects in development with Legendary, Warner Brothers, Appian Way, and Universal. Next up for Chandor is *DEEPWATER HORIZON* starring Mark Wahlberg, which he will direct for Lionsgate/Participant.

Chandor holds a bachelor's degree in American Studies and Film Studies from The College of Wooster in Ohio and studied film production at New York University. He grew up in the suburbs of New York City and London, England, and currently lives outside New York City with his wife, painter Cameron Goodyear, and their two children.

### **NEAL DODSON** (Producer)

Prior to producing *A MOST VIOLENT YEAR*, Dodson produced J.C. Chandor's second film, *ALL IS LOST*, which was nominated for and won many awards, as well as Chandor's first film, *MARGIN CALL*, for which Dodson won an Independent Spirit Award. Additionally he produced the film *BREAKUP AT A WEDDING* and executive produced *HOLLIDAYSBURG*, *THE BANSHEE CHAPTER*, *ANOTHER CINDERELA STORY*, and *PERIODS* and co-produced *HATESHIP LOVESHIP*. Dodson co-executive produces the Starz documentary series *THE CHAIR* with Chris Moore, and is currently shooting *YOU WERE NEVER HERE* starring Mireille Enos and Sam Shepard. Next up for Dodson is working on Chandor's *DEEPWATER HORIZON* for Lionsgate/Participant.

### **ANNA GERB** (Producer)

Anna Gerb produced J.C. Chandor's second feature film ALL IS LOST and co-produced his first film MARGIN CALL. Both were nominated for Academy Awards. ALL IS LOST was nominated for four Independent Spirit Awards including Gerb for "Best Picture". She Executive Produced the film FRANCINE starring Academy-Award winner Melissa Leo. In her native Canada, she produced BLOOD, directed by Jerry Ciccoritti and produced James Hyslop's documentary ME, MYSELF, AND THE DEVIL for CBC. Next up for Gerb is working on Chandor's DEEPWATER HORIZON for Lionsgate/Participant.

**BRADFORD YOUNG** (Cinematographer)

Bradford Young recently completed principal photography on Ava DuVernay's SELMA and on Ed Zwick's PAWN SACRIFICE. His previous film contributions include AIN'T THEM BODIES SAINTS and MOTHER OF GEORGE for which he was awarded the 2013 Sundance US Dramatic Competition Excellence in Cinematography award for both films. Other films include Dee Ree's PARIAN, for which he won the 2011 Sundance US Dramatic Competition Excellence in Cinematography Award, DuVernay's MIDDLE OF NOWHERE, Tina Mabry's MISSISSIPPI DAMNED, Paola Mendoza's ENTRE NOS, and Andrew Dosunmu's, RESTLESS CITY. Young was named "25 New Faces of Independent Film" by Filmmaker Magazine in 2009 and Variety Magazine's "Up Next 25 Masters of Their Craft" that same year.

**ALEX EBERT** (Composer, Original Song "America For Me")

Alex previously collaborated with J.C. Chandor on the original score for ALL IS LOST, for which he won a Golden Globe. He is the multi-talented musician and songwriter behind the band EDWARD SHARPE AND THE MAGENTIC ZEROS. Edward Sharpe has toured the world extensively including the Railroad Revival Tour with Mumford & Sons. A documentary chronicling that trek, BIG EASY EXPRESS, earned a Grammy Award. He previously led the band IMA ROBOT and released a solo album ALEXANDER in 2011. Ebert's music has also appeared in such films as AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY, WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU'RE EXPECTING, GOING THE DISTANCE, and 10 YEARS.

**KASIA WALICKA-MAIMONE** (Costume Designer)

A frequent collaborator with filmmaker Bennett Miller, Kasia Walicka-Maimone was Costume Designer on FOXCATCHER and the multi-award-winning MONEYBALL and CAPOTE. She received a Costume Designers Guild Award nomination for her work on CAPOTE and a second nomination for her acclaimed costumes in Wes Anderson's hit MOONRISE KINGDOM. Walicka-Maimone also

designed THE ADJUSTMENT BUREAU, AMELIA, LITTLE MANHATTAN, and JESUS' SON, among other films. Her recent work can be seen in ST. VINCENT and the upcoming BLACK MASS.

**JOHN P. GOLDSMITH** (Production Designer)

John P. Goldsmith is an award-winning, multi-disciplinary artist and designer based in Los Angeles. He previously worked with J.C. Chandor as the production designer of ALL IS LOST. He was the art director on Best Picture Oscar-winner NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN as well as Emmy and Golden Globe Award-winner JOHN ADAMS. Additional credits include Steven Spielberg's THE ADVENTURES OF TINTIN, Robert Zemeckis' POLAR EXPRESS, and Oliver Stone's NATURAL BORN KILLERS.

**RON PATANE** (Editor)

Ron Patane is a frequent collaborator with filmmaker Derek Cianfrance, best known for his work editing PLACE BEYOND THE PINES and the Oscar-nominated BLUE VALENTINE. He most recently edited documentarian Amy Berg's narrative feature debut, EVERY SECRET THING. Ron graduated from Vassar College and has worked in the film industry ever since, moving among film, documentary, commercials, television, and music videos.

**STEVE BOEDDEKER** (Supervising Sound Editor/Re-Recording Mixer/Sound Designer)

Steve Boeddeker previously worked with J.C. Chandor on ALL IS LOST, for which he was nominated for an Academy Award and a BAFTA Award. His mixing and sound design work can be heard in NOW YOU SEE ME, I ORIGINS, Best Picture nominee BEASTS OF THE SOUTHERN WILD, Best Picture nominee LINCOLN, TRON: LEGACY, ALICE IN WONDERLAND, CHARLIE AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY, SWEENEY TODD, FIGHT CLUB, and many more.

**RICHARD HYMNS** (Supervising Sound Editor)

Richard Hymns previously worked with J.C. Chandor on ALL IS LOST for which he was nominated for an Academy Award and a BAFTA Award. He has won three Academy Awards from nine nominations, four Motion Picture Sound Editors (MPSE) Golden Reel Awards, and a BAFTA. He was the Supervising Sound Editor of SAVING PRIVATE RYAN, FIGHT CLUB, INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE, JURASSIC PARK, TERMINATOR 2: JUDGEMENT DAY, WAR HORSE, and LINCOLN, among others.

**MARK RUSSELL** (Visual Effects Supervisor)

Mark Russell began his career in film after attending the University of Southern California, working on groundbreaking films including **SAVING PRIVATE RYAN**, **MINORITY REPORT** and **HELLBOY**. Since moving to New York, he has supervised the visual effects in independent projects including **SLEEP DEALER**, **PLEASE GIVE**, **SYNECDOCHE**, **NEW YORK**, and **EUROPA REPORT**. Mark's work can be seen in **THE ADJUSTMENT BUREAU** and **TOWER HEIST**, both from Universal Studios. Most recently Mark was the visual effects producer on Martin Scorsese's **THE WOLF OF WALL STREET**.