

## The Report – *DC in the Movies*

Washington wonks who follow foreign and national security affairs might recall the period, beginning some ten years ago, when the US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence investigated CIA activities in the “war on terror.” Committee staff produced a massive report on America’s brutal secret war to battle terrorism, work that eventually resulted in key findings that were released by the Committee’s Chairman Senator Diane Feinstein. Now, that inside-Washington story is the subject of “The Report,” another “based-on” case transformed into a riveting thriller based on that investigation.

The film introduces us to ex-FBI officer turned idealistic staffer, Daniel J. Jones (the aptly named Adam Driver), who is tasked by his boss, Sen. Feinstein (Annette Bening), to lead an investigation into the CIA’s controversial anti-terrorist detention program, created in the anxious aftermath of the 9/11 attack. That investigation consumes five dogged years, focusing especially on the Agency’s use of “enhanced interrogation techniques” (EIT), questionable practices amounting to torture (sleep deprivation, beatings and humiliations, water boarding, etc.) sanctified by certain CIA-hired psychologists. If the film has full-out villains, it is those coarse and clueless psychologists (named Mitchell and Jessen) who fill the bill.

Jones’ assembles a team that works in a secret CIA facility to find out the truth of these practices, but their progress is thwarted at various turns by political resentments, Agency cover-ups and stalls, and destroyed evidence. Though his team (originally bipartisan) dwindles, Jones continues a relentless pursuit of the truth that eventually leads to the dramatic findings that Feinstein revealed in 2014.

It is a task which both overarches the deeds committed by intelligence operatives during the Bush Administration as well as the caution and concern of the Obama period to release such explosive information. Through it all, Jones makes his case to the concerned but ever skeptical Sen. Feinstein, who seeks an iron-clad case to present to the public. The drama comes down to whether such a report of American wrong-doing ever makes it to the Senate floor.

Can you make a pulse-pounding drama out of document-reading, computer scrolling, staff briefings, and phone exchanges? Turns out you can, as “The Report”—written and directed by Scott Z. Burns—with a cool-looking, quick-cutting, unremittingly paced story dominated by the resolute Adam Driver, whom we see in overdrive (pun intended) mode throughout

most of the picture (he has no backstory. Bening, as the senator, captures Feinstein with both an accurate wig and with deliberate, slightly monotonic readings which belie the actress's normal ebullient nature to match the senator's real cadence.

In striking contrast to the film's somber bureaucratic settings, the movie also includes horrendous—and hard to watch--flash-backs (filmed in noisy, quick cuts in garish light) to give the viewer a dose of what the captives suffered.

In this, Burns first feature as a director, there are a string of other solid turns by a talented cast including Jon Hamm, Michael C. Hall, Maura Tierney, Douglas Hodge, Ted Levine, Tim Blake Nelson, Matthew Rhys, and Corey Stoll, completing a powerful ensemble that rounds out Driver's uncompromising performance.

(DC Notes: The film was essentially filmed in New York studios, including a decent re-creation of the Senate floor with Feinstein present. Yet it also did a bit of location shooting in Washington, offering establishing shots of the Capitol and downtown DC in passing. The finale, though, highlights DC: it shows the triumphant Jones looming over the steps of the Grant Memorial—the closest commercial filmmakers can currently get to the Capitol (shown in the background). The sequence then follows the staffer walking down the Mall with the Washington Monument looming in the distance just before the end credits.)

*(The film, which is rated "R" for tough torture sequences and runs 119 minutes, is now in area theaters and available on Amazon Prime.)*

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