

Fauci – DC in the Movies

“America’s Favorite Doctor,” i.e., Dr. Anthony Fauci, has become a household name with his singular knowledge as head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) in a time of COVID-19. His remarks on the science of epidemiology made him a TV superstar, delivering sometimes dozens of interviews per day. Moreover, his assured manner and distinctive Brooklyn voice were a balm for a concerned and confused public.

Adding to his celebrity was his presence on the White House Coronavirus Task Force, where he represented medical reason amidst presidential hunches and grandstanding as President Trump took over the group’s narrative. He came out of the Trump years untainted (though vilified by some Trump supporters) and surfaced again as a chief adviser to the Biden administration.

His expertise on the coronavirus front are an important part of “Fauci,” but only a part. The movie is an admiring biography of this treasured civil servant whose career—50 plus years at NIH—deals with other international epidemics, including HIV/AIDS, SARS, and Ebola.

An extended sequence on AIDS is effective because it was inherently dramatic and his first national exposure on a major virus while also introducing criticism of him as a stodgy bureaucrat. While the Reagan Administration’s initial reaction to the AIDS crisis was silent or wary, it was Dr. Fauci who first came to pay serious attention to both activist’s protests and the scientific questioning of the Act-Up coalition. He went from being a pariah to their ally and helped steer the virus to a treatable malady.

The film, directed by John Hoffman and Janet Tobias, captures the Fauci saga in media sequences, leavened with contemporary footage of the doctor and his family, humanizing this committed man. The filmmakers, in fact, had to delicately shoot around Fauci’s Trump period, showing him only in his office or at home, so that any live comments critical of an irascible president did not get back to Trump.

(The film is rated “PG-13” and runs 104 minutes.)

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