

## DC in the Movies: Mark Felt: The Man Who Brought Down the White House

A movie about Washington's most abiding secret—the identity of “Deep Throat” of the Watergate era—has finally made it to the screen in Peter Landesman's “Mark Felt,” an inquiry into the character who, as Deputy Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation during 1972-73, spilled the beans about Executive Branch shenanigans to a youthful Bob Woodward of the Washington Post.

Consider it “All the President's Men” turned on its head and christen it instead “Not the President's Man.” This narrative begins in spring 1972, when Felt (Liam Neeson), a 30-year-old man with the FBI now in his deputy spot, expects a promotion to Director when J. Edgar Hoover dies on May 2. The loyal Felt is crushed when he is passed over for Patrick Gray (Marton Csokas), a naval officer and lawyer, who becomes Acting Director. With a team loyal to him, including Ed Miller (Tony Goldwyn) and Charlie Bates (Josh Lucas), Felt begins investigating the Watergate break-in, early on intuiting that it leads to the White House and the Nixon campaign committee, and that Gray himself is involved in the cover-up of illegal activities with White House counsel John Dean (Michael C. Hall).

The ins-and-outs of the details of Felt's investigation, the pressures on him and the FBI lifers, and the journalistic probing of Watergate all lead to his famous parking garage meetings with Woodward (Julian Morris, no look-alike) and the unraveling of the scandal. The film also adds other elements to Felt's workplace motivation, specifically his parallel concerns about his alcoholic, troubled wife Audrey (Diane Lane) and his rebellious daughter Joan (Maika Monroe) a political radical who has left home for possible involvement with groups like the Weather Underground.

Through it all, Felt is a stolid, knit-browed figure draped in a blue-gray suit and unvarnished integrity—though he is not above holding back information from his superiors. The film clearly means to offer a profile of the dogged, principled whistleblower, but Neeson's granitic presence reveals little with which to sympathize. He's resolute, perhaps, but not heroic. The story provides some ingrained suspense, of course, but a parade of decent actors (like Lane) is little used when the plot's the thing. One thing missing is poignancy.

“Mark Felt” was a long-time project of writer-director Landesman (“Parkland”), a journalist who was commissioned for a script when Felt's “Deep Throat” identity as revealed in the 2005 Vanity Fair article. Finally getting his chance to mount the production, he comes through with a workmanlike effort, one that will appeal especially to DC denizens who lived through the Watergate story.

One thing Landesman decided early on was that—unlike “All the President's Men”—he would not depend on Washington locations, like so many recent DC-based films. Thus, the picture was essentially shot in Atlanta, with a sprinkling of images of the Watergate complex, the Justice Department, and nighttime Washington to give some sense of place. Since the bulk of the film features men in suits in offices, Atlanta can serve almost as well.

*(The film is rated “PG-13” and runs 103 mins.)*

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