

UNFIT: DC in the Movies

Within the last year, as the 2020 presidential election approached, there has been a mini-deluge of films and television programs from Democratic activists about the “existential threat” to our democracy by the Trump Administration, a period deemed so outside our political norms that our republic was in peril. Some of these efforts were sardonic, some sarcastic, some earnest, some enraged.

Perhaps feeling their tone was becoming somewhat repetitive, a few Trump critics developed a new cinematic angle of attack, this time focused pointedly on the president’s **mental health**. “UNFIT: The Psychology of Donald Trump” tries to make the case that Trump suffers from a genuine psychiatric malady called “malignant narcissism” which makes him unsuited for national office.

The director of “UNFIT,” Dan Partland, in an introductory note on the film, acknowledges up front that it will be seen as “partisan and preaching to the converted,” but he insists that, while it **may be** “preaching to anyone who will listen,” its goal is to “provide language and a framework for lay people to benefit from the decades of science and research that has studied these behaviors.”

One leading voice in the film is Dr. John Gartner, a psychologist and founding member of the “Duty to Warn “ coalition aimed at removing Trump from office because of his mental deficiencies. He is joined by several other psychiatrists and psychologists, as well as commentators often seen on cable TV, figures like Malcom Nance, Anthony Scaramucci, Bill Kristol, and George Conway, co-founder of the anti-Trump Lincoln Project, producing anti-Trump ads for national distribution. All the talking heads narrate their views behind a parade of clips illustrating Trump’s most daffy statements and egregious lies.

A ready criticism of the film can be made that none of the experts interviewed have ever had a personal interview with the President, so their interpretations amount to hearsay or mere opinion. The filmmakers also acknowledge in advance that lack of personal interaction but argue that there is more than enough in Trump’s incessant observed behavior to make their psychiatric case.

I’m not sure DC viewers will have much to learn from “UNFIT,” but they can be sure to have their political wounds somewhat assuaged while their rage remains intact.

(The film is not rated, runs 83 minutes, and became available on digital streaming platforms on September 1).

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