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FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Film Critic: ?Mark Felt? vs. ?The Post?

By Stephen Somerville

Your scribe has patiently been waiting for two particular movies to hit the silver screen; ?Mark Felt ? The Man Who Brought Down the White House? and ?The Post.?

Both movies are about very interesting and controversial issues from the early 1970s. The settings and the clothing that the actors/actresses wear is very convincing. And both movies have easily recognizable stars in the leading roles.

But that is where the comparisons end.

Mark Felt, portrayed by actor Liam Neeson, was a thirty year employee of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) who rose to be the number two man in the organization, behind the legendary J. Edgar Hoover.

If you don't know his name, you will probably recognize him if I tell you that he was the ?Deep Throat? source of Washington Post reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein during the Watergate Scandal.

Mr. Felt's identity as Deep Throat was carefully hidden for thirty years and was not revealed until 2001 when he was 91 years old and in ill health.

Mr. Felt's children and grand-children wanted him to go public, believing that he was an American patriot.

The movie concentrates on his team of law enforcement personnel who investigated the break-ins at the Democratic National Party Head Quarters in the Watergate Building in June 1972.

The FBI was thwarted in its investigation by the new head of the FBI, Pat Gray, who was a White House political appointee on the recent death of Mr. Hoover, who had run the FBI for fifty years.

At every turn, Mr. Felt and his team were stymied by Mr. Gray and U.S. President Richard Nixon's White House. The FBI were ordered to not follow certain leads.

Mr. Felt took it upon himself to leak parts of the investigation to reporters at the New York Times but most famously in his detailed conversations with Carl Bernstein.

The movie was disappointing to me. I now know why the movie did not even hit the cinemas in Canada; it went straight to Netflix.

While Neeson provided an understated, but strong performance, the writing was terrible. There was no drama, or excitement with the movie. Although we already knew what was going to occur at the end of the Titanic movie, nonetheless the story and the characters were interesting.

I would give this movie a four out of ten.

Contrast this movie with ?The Post?.

Tom Hanks stars as Ben Bradlee, the editor of the Washington Post and Meryl Streep as Washington Post owner, Katherine Graham. Both of their performances are, in my humble opinion, worthy of Oscar Award consideration.

The movie opens with Daniel Ellsberg, who is young U.S. army officer, involved in a firefight in Vietnam. After a tour of duty he leaves the army and goes to work for the Rand Corporation, which is a U.S. Defense Think Tank.

He accompanies U.S. Defence Secretary Bob McNamara on a fact finding Mission to Vietnam and tells the Secretary that he does not feel progress is being made, which is contrary to what a number of the advisors to McNamara believe.

Ellsberg is very concerned about the state of the war and decides to photo copy and leak to the press a 7,000 page document that McNamara commissioned about the U.S.'s involvement in Vietnam since 1945. This document becomes better known as the Pentagon Papers.

The rest of the movie deals with the competition between the Washington Post and the New York Times over Vietnam-related stories and if the Washington Post will release the Pentagon Papers when the New York Times faces an injunction for trying to do so.

The pace and excitement of the movie was wonderful. The movie really made you think about the key issue of freedom of the press and whether releasing historical information about the Vietnam War put the then current Vietnamese war effort in jeopardy.

The U.S. Supreme Court voted 6-3 in favour of the release of the Pentagon Papers.

I would give this movie a nine out of ten. Then again, I gave Clint Eastwood's ?Fistful of Dollars?, and the movies ?Midway? and ?Contact?, also a nine.

The Post is currently playing at the Cineplex Odeon in Aurora.

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