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Introduction to Understanding Film

All the President's Men

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The movie, *All the President's Men*, is based on the famous Watergate scandal told from the standpoint of two reporters, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, who at the time worked for the Washington Post. They uncover the truth about the Republican Party and the presidential administration, and, as the movie unfolds, the viewers observe how a major newspaper and the major governmental institutions operate. In the end, democracy prevails and the faith in the U.S. Constitution is restored when Richard Nixon and his followers get what they deserved.

The fact that the reporters keep their promise and don't divulge their sources, reminds viewers of the old times, when someone's word was a sure guarantee. This contrasts with the facts about the corrupt administration whose members also have sworn to defend their country but instead do everything possible to protect and promote their own interests.

When the Bernstein and Woodward uncover the truth, they share it with the whole country—which was the right thing to do—even if their reputation was a stake, due to the fact that the story seemed unbelievable. Their research proves very difficult, because in order to uncover the truth, they must assume the “un-assumable”—that is, the *White House* is not so “white” after all: “The truth is, I can't figure out what we've got,” says one of the reporters helping with the case. As we can see, it's hard for them to imagine something bad about their leaders, and for the normal people it's almost impossible. There are a few characters who seem very troubled about

being involved in something so ugly; and even when they start to suspect that, they still hope they might be wrong, almost praying for it. Denial is the word that comes to mind in this case, due to the fact that the people involved are the result of a time of “innocence” in America. In the end, they figure it out anyways, and their ideals about a perfect administration—and the reality of their own world—are betrayed.

“Forget the myths the media has created about the *White House*...Follow the money!” says an undisclosed recipient. The reporters do just that, and what they discover destroys the flawless image that the press had created in the past about the government. Their story portrays the loss of “innocence” in America, by uncovering the truth about a corrupted administration. The whole country feels betrayed, and people don’t know who to trust anymore, because what the administration has done “is a threat to the Constitution. It goes against everything the [American people] stand for,” says Mrs. Carolyn Abbot.

The pretty houses and streets, and the way people behave and think of themselves, remind us of the good old times. This is mainly why most of the people refused to betray the administration, by withholding information about a secret cash fund, “You people! You think that you can come into my home, ask a few questions, have me destroy the reputation of men that I work for and respect. Do you understand loyalty? Have you ever heard of loyalty?” comments someone—but the times have changed and society is forced to “grow up” and adapt to new times, whether it likes it or not. In the end justice prevails, but the cost to the nation is enormous, because peoples’ trust has been broken and the government has become just another institution that could threaten democracy and the Constitution.

As we can see, this movie is about the painful transition of America, from times where respect for the government was never doubted, to times where the reality can be anything. “Trust No One,” doesn’t seem like a line from X-files anymore, but a part of our day-to-day lives, as the “innocence” of the American public has been shattered.

Works Cited

All the President's Men, dir. Alan J. Pakula. Warner Bros. and Wildwood, 1976.