

The Report (2019)



Daniel Jones holds a page of his Report so heavily censored by the CIA that it is meaningless. (c)
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There are times when those who love truth and justice weep for their country. Such a time is covered by writer/director Scott Z. Burns' political thriller that unfolds like a relentless legal brief. It is the story of Daniel J. Jones (Adam Driver), a member of the staff of California's Senator Dianne Feinstein (Annette Bening). As head of the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee, she charges Jones to lead the 2014 probe of the CIA's Detention and Interrogation Program, created in the aftermath of 9/11 and, sadly, promoted during the Bush administration. Note the name of the program, bearing out George Orwell's observation in his famous essay "Politics and the English Language" that governments resort to euphemisms to cover up the truth of its deeds—the resulting report, after five years of intense effort, was referred to as "The Torture Report."

This is an important film that every American should see, and especially because its subtheme of the executive branch of government trying to override the legislative branch is as relevant as today's Washington headlines.

Jones is depicted as dogged in his determination, first to

discover the truth—he and his small crew will sift through over six *million* CIA documents—and then to get that truth to the public when the CIA, having destroyed the tapes of its “interrogations,” uses all of its allies to suppress the report. One person tells him late in the film, “They asked you to build a boat, but they had no intention of sailing it.” There are times when the film resembles *All the President’s Men*, including Deep Throat-like encounters with a CIA medical officer Raymond Nathan (Tim Blake Nelson) and a New York Times national security reporter ([Matthew Rhys](#)).

Adam Driver, playing a character so different from his cop in *BlackKlansman* and the bus driver/poet in *Patterson*, is convincing as the sober, obsessed investigator who will not give up, even when one of his disturbed colleagues, tired of toiling away in the dingy basement room assigned them, throws in the towel. He is respectful of his boss, but when the Senator at times, faced with political expediency, wavers in her support, he insists on pushing back against their opponents.

[Annette Bening](#) probably will receive a lot of attention for portraying Dianne Feinstein, a politician who wants to get at the truth of what could be regarded as war crimes, yet pulled in another direction by her party, led by President Obama who does not want to be seen as overly partisan by prosecuting members of the previous administration. Knowing full well the upheaval the detailed report could create (it is *seven thousand* pages!), she hesitates. How can you go against the President and your party?

Douglas Hodge plays the chilling Dr. Jim Mitchell, the psychologist with a private contracting company who believes that “enhanced interrogation” (another euphemism) will lead to the Muslim prisoners revealing their secrets. In mercifully brief sequences we see sleep-deprived detainees shackled to walls and the floor; restrained in 24-hour-lighted rooms with heavy metal music blasting without letup; sitting with their

heads covered by black cloths while water is poured through it to the point of their losing consciousness. I expected to see a clip of Vice President Cheney denying that water boarding is torture, but the filmmakers do not go that far, though they do make plain that he was in charge of the program and kept President Bush out of the loop. When it was mentioned that Dr. Mitchell was given a budget of \$80 million for his morally reprehensible program, I wondered how much Dr. Mengele was given by the Nazis for his horrible experiments on prisoners at Auschwitz.

The Report opened with a title card that says "The Torture Report" with the word "torture" quickly dropped, showing that even the title of this film, *The Report*, is a euphemism. This redacting will be the tactic of the CIA when faced with the inevitability that Daniel Jones' voluminous work will at last see the light of day. The report they approve will be a digest of the original 7000 pages with blacked out lines far more numerous than legible ones. Thus, the struggle to release a report that will name names, thus holding the torturers and officials who ordered their horrible deeds—in stark contrast to the Geneva Convention—accountable, is as much an uphill battle as the fight to dig up the facts. And this is under a Democratic administration. Thus, the film does not spare President Obama from being complicit. The fact that the morally repugnant program did not result in any plot being foiled or information leading to the arrest of other terrorists—the CIA to the contrary—makes the new administration involved in the failure to prosecute anyone for war crimes. This is not another liberal work, but a politically neutral one dedicated to ferreting out the truth and sharing it with the public.

The film in stressing over and over the failure of torture to turn up any useful intelligence also repudiates the Hollywood effort to gloss over the program, the film calling out [Zero Dark Thirty](#) for supporting the CIA's lies. It is a wonder that

those who went along with President Trump's refusal to trust the CIA's conclusion that the Russians gave their support to his election campaign did not bring up the Agency's campaign to cover up and deny its torture campaign, perhaps the most egregious phase of its history. It is sobering that to realize that a number of Americans, including a former Vice President, are at liberty among us who are considered by some, overseas and in this nation, as war criminals given a pass by a President too timid to prosecute them.

It is good to learn about a brave man who assumed the role of the God who, according to [Daniel](#) "reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with him." Given that the word prophet means one through whom God speaks, Daniel J. Jones is indeed a prophet deserving of recognition and honor. This film reveals what a staunch prophet he was at a time when the highest powers in our government strove to keep "hidden things" "in the darkness." Released today, when Congress is again locked in mortal combat to exercise its oversight of the alleged misdeeds of an Administration that believes it is above the law, it is perhaps the most important film now showing, providing inspiration to all who long for truth and justice to triumph at last.

This review will be in the July issue of VP along with a set of questions for reflection and/or discussion. If you have found reviews on this site helpful, please consider purchasing a subscription or individual issue in The Store

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