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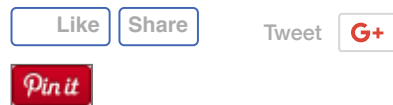


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GOOD NIGHT, AND GOOD LUCK.

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By *Erica Abeel* ([Http://Www.Filmjournal.Com/Taxonomy/Term/93](http://www.filmjournal.com/Taxonomy/Term/93)) Oct 5, 2005



Reviews

For his second directorial outing, George Clooney has chosen to dramatize the televised face-off between Edward R. Murrow and Senator Joe McCarthy during the communist "witch hunts" of the 1950s. The film has a fluid, affable manner (not unlike Clooney himself, as he comes across onscreen and in interviews); its liberal politics are impeccable; the period is lovingly recreated-and let's not forget that it opened this year's New York Film Festival. Most remarkably, Clooney has placed politics at the center of a film. But if *Good Night, and Good Luck*. has a flaw, it's a hint of righteousness. There's something faintly self-congratulatory about its depiction of integrity versus villainy, especially since the much-reviled senator from Wisconsin now seems an easy target.

Murrow (David Strathairn) and his dedicated staff at CBS-headed by his producer Fred Friendly (Clooney) and Joe Wershba (Robert Downey, Jr.)-brave corporate pressures in order to expose the lies and scare-mongering perpetrated by McCarthy, as he fingered supposed communists through his Government Operations Committee. McCarthy retaliates by smearing Murrow, anchor of "See It Now," as a pinko himself. In this clammy climate, the CBS crew pursue their mission, their doggedness paying off when the Senate finally censures the senator. The docudrama is framed by Murrow's prescient speech at an industry tribute in 1958 in which he castigated TV as a vehicle to "distract, delude, amuse and insulate."

Confined mainly to the CBS studios and offices, the film feels remarkably like an artifact from a period of smoke-filled newsrooms (Murrow was famously a chain-smoker), when white-shirted muckrakers, talking on top of one another, worked in synchrony to slay the dragon. Archival footage that displays the real McCarthy meshes seamlessly with the black-and-white lensing and Clooney's

restless, inquisitive visual style, announced straight off as the camera pans around '50s clean-shaven faces and the women's lacquered nails.

Clooney confidently lasers away the characters' personal lives to focus on Murrow's maneuverings. For comic relief, we have Murrow's disdainful twitch after his interview with Liberace. And his dry-martini wit. When Paley (Frank Langella) invites him to a Knicks game, Murrow declines with, "I'm a little busy bringing down the network." Dianne Reeves as a jazz singer provides a moody, evocative bridge between high-wire scenes. As Murrow, Strathairn is uncanny, and even resembles the dark, taciturn, unflappable icon. Best of all, this piece of history broadcasts lessons for today, as when Murrow proclaims on his show, "We must not confuse dissent with disloyalty."

-Erica Abeel

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