



FILM: **THE CANDIDATE**

FDG RATING: 2.7 ☹️☹️☹️⬜⬜

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Michael Ritchie: *director*
Jeremy Lerner: *screen play, Academy award*
Robert Redford: *actor, Bill McKay*

DATE: November 15, 2020

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **THE CANDIDATE**

It was especially interesting to watch and discuss the 1972 film, *The Candidate*, (starring Robert Redford as candidate Bill McKay) in the midst of our Nov. 2020 historical election campaigns. We peeked at the behind-the-scenes machinations as part of Bill McKay's campaign, all of which were being played out, more egregiously, in our current competitive political environment.

Bill, an idealistic, highly principled legal aid attorney, son of a former California governor, is drafted (for name recognition) by the Democrats to run for Senator, although not expected to have the slightest chance of winning since the Republicans were considered unbeatable and no big-name Democrat wanted to enter the unwinnable race. Bill agrees since he is free to campaign saying exactly what he wants seeing it as an opportunity to spread his values. He even firmly states, "I call the shots, don't tell me what to do."

But the film is a testament to the power of political propaganda and how easily the ego is seduced: Bill becomes reluctant to antagonize potential voters, thus dilutes his staunch positions on issues to purposely sound vague, eventually completely compromising his beliefs upon realizing that he has a good chance of winning. He no longer calls the shots, but instead goes along with the staged machinations of the campaign managers, such as rushing to a fire for a photo opportunity that gets upstaged by the Republican candidate who is more finessed at seizing PR opportunities, grabbing the spotlight. He becomes increasingly dependent on the advice of his campaign manager and media consultants who tell him how best to answer reporters' questions, provide canned responses for supposedly spontaneous televised debates, instruct film editors to piece together video clips designed to portray him in the most positive light, and arrange campaign dinners with influential party leaders and celebrities. An uncomfortably familiar scene is at the end when Bill, having actually won the election, looks drained, a bit dazed, and asks, "Now, what do I do?"

The film's depiction is reflective of post-1960s American pessimism toward government. Described as a satire, possibly being the first film to expose devious behind-the-scenes maneuvers in political campaigns, it is all unfortunately part of our daily 2020 election news at an exponential degree. As one discussion participant noted, things really haven't changed except the scheming was much milder in the 70s.

On the positive side, one discussion participant thought the film was an earnest depiction of someone with sound principles who gets corrupted. Another thought the subtle erosion of Bill's principles was well done. But more resident reviewers found the film slow, with not a lot to offer. Our collective votes for *The Candidate* were a less than winning 2.7 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best).



See you at the movies!

Adriane Dedic, adedic@pacbell.net

www.filmdiscussiongroup.com