

**THE MOST DANGEROUS MAN IN AMERICA:
DANIEL ELLSBERG AND THE PENTAGON PAPERS**

Press & Reviews

Variety

<http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117941052.html?categoryid=31&cs=1>

September 13, 2009

Ronnie Scheib

"The Most Dangerous Man in America," Judith Ehrlich and Rick Goldsmith's cogent docu about Daniel Ellsberg, the high-level Pentagon official and Vietnam War planner who leaked the Pentagon Papers to the New York Times, crams a wealth of material into 90 minutes without losing clarity or momentum. Fascinating for those who lived through the controversy and those for whom the incident rings only the faintest of bells, the pic wisely allows obvious parallels between Vietnam and Iraq to hover unspoken. Must-see docu is skedded to open Sept. 16 at Gotham's Film Forum after its Toronto fest bow.

The pic opens with the publication of the Papers and the resultant media storm, FBI manhunt and branding of Ellsberg by Henry Kissinger as "the most dangerous man in America." The story then backtracks to follow the sequence of key events in Ellsberg's life: the deaths of his mother and sister (when his father fell asleep at the wheel); his seminal doctoral thesis on decision theory; his 1954-57 stint in the Marines ("the happiest time of my life"); and finally his position in the Defense Department under Robert McNamara.

Ellsberg was instrumental in compiling reports to justify bombing North Vietnam. The docu dramatizes the glee with which Ellsberg sought and found a Viet Cong atrocity (complete with graphic details) to strengthen the case for a policy that he personally opposed. Guilt over this deed would color all his subsequent actions.

Some may criticize the filmmakers' strict adherence to Ellsberg as both narrator and star, but the docu focuses on his moral turnaround, which directly impacted history. This unique fusion of personal and social drama allows the pic to avoid the usual canned montage-of-the-times approach. The footage places Ellsberg at the center of both polar factions regarding Vietnam: playing Pentagon war games *and* marching in peace protests.

Ehrlich and Goldsmith's varied storytelling techniques include interviews with eclectic talking heads, re-enactments of shadowy figures Xeroxing thousands of pages, crude animation of secret transfers of boxes of documents, and tape recorders spinning Nixon's uncensored commentary.

Once Ellsberg resolves to publish the 7,000 page secret Rand history of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, detailing the lies of four American presidents who plunged the country ever deeper into what increasingly proved to be an unwinnable war, his action (and its attendant threat of a life behind bars) is mirrored by a succession of newspaper editors who reprinted the documents, despite injunctions and court orders, in an impressive show of First Amendment solidarity.

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While a present-day Ellsberg complains that the massive number of bombs dropped on Vietnam, which he repeatedly mentioned in press conferences back then, was never duly reported, Ehrlich and Goldsmith redress that silence with a bombardment of newsreel images of aerial destruction.

Time Out NY

“The Insider”

<http://newyork.timeout.com/articles/film/78384/the-insider>

It’s a piece of footage that’s so pure, even Oliver Stone knew not to mess with it: The middle-aged man stands amid a forest of microphones. Cameras catch sight of a smiling woman by his side—his wife. Daniel Ellsberg has been underground for days; now turning himself in, he is accused of espionage. “I wonder if there are many people here who wouldn’t think that ten years in prison was very cheap, if they could contribute to ending this war,” he says. The words are firm.

“I was sure that my children would only be seeing me through heavy glass,” Ellsberg, 78, tells TONY by phone from his home in Kensington, California, just outside of Berkeley. “I knew they would hear a lot of stories—that their father was a traitor and had gone crazy. But I wanted them to have a clear image that what I was doing was soberly thought-out.”

Ellsberg, then a 40-year-old career defense analyst and self-described “Cold War liberal,” had made the decision to leak thousands of pages of top-secret military documents to the press. Their publication as the Pentagon Papers, starting in June 1971, was the beginning of the end for the Nixon administration; though they weren’t the subject of the Vietnam exposé, all the President’s men overreacted with break-ins and illegal spying. The episode is at the heart of the essential new documentary *The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers*.

“The compelling nature of this story was off the charts,” offers the film’s codirector Rick Goldsmith, 58. “It’s essentially about risk: Am I doing enough? Or am I just living out my quiet existence?” Sifting through thousands of feet of archival footage with his collaborator, Judith Ehrlich, Goldsmith shaped a profile that works as both a biographical portrait of a man marked by personal tragedy (his mother and sister died next to him in a car crash) and a study in belated conscience.

“It took us a while to get him onboard,” recalls Ehrlich, 61, who eventually solicited Ellsberg and his wife, Patricia, via some old-fashioned Bay Area networking. “Errol Morris was seriously thinking about making Ellsberg his first narrative feature too,” she adds. “I don’t know if that’s public knowledge. But Errol ultimately gave us his blessing—and a 500-page interview.”

The leaker’s eventful life, with its mix of romantic self-sacrifice and momentous impact, is still discussed in Hollywood as a project for some future heir to Warren Beatty’s

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handsome activism. (An earnest 2003 TV version starring James Spader fumbled.) Contributing to the gravity of this documentary, though, is the voice of another whistleblower. “There’s no question in my mind—I remember it vividly—that after the Pentagon Papers, everything in the White House changed,” says former Nixon counsel John Dean, 70, calling TONY from Beverly Hills. “That’s when the dark period starts.” Dean, who famously warned his boss of a “cancer on the presidency,” remembers an unruffled Nixon on the day Ellsberg’s revelations went public. “Honestly, he seemed more interested in the coverage of his daughter’s wedding than this study in the other corner of the front page,” he says. “It wasn’t until Henry [Kissinger] came into the office screaming that the president started getting worried. Somehow Henry pushed Nixon’s manhood button. And when he did, all Nixon could do was show how tough he could be on Ellsberg.” (Kissinger unwittingly lends the doc its title.)

Ask the most dangerous man about the domino effect he had on the administration and he’ll modestly deflect the conversation forward. “We need a new Pentagon Papers—tomorrow isn’t soon enough,” Ellsberg insists, “because it’s almost certainly worse over there than they’re telling us. I see Barack Obama proceeding in ways that are either wrongheaded or inadequate, and that won’t change without public pressure.” Dean, a strong critic of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, concurs. “The lessons of Watergate and the Pentagon Papers have been totally lost,” he contends. “The Bush-Cheney people have virtually erased them from institutional memory—it’s baffling. And if I can do anything to bring that memory back, I think I should do it.”

Ellsberg eagerly counts off current abuses of power, from CIA torture sites to surveillance ops. Clearly for him, the fight is far from over. “I was a nuclear-war planner,” he explains, “so the idea of disaster striking is not just a hypothetical possibility.” He pauses and laughs. “People ask me why I’m still at it, and I say, ‘Well, they’re still at it, too.’”

The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers opens Wed 16 at Film Forum.

Entertainment Weekly

September 14, 2009

Owen Gleiberman

<http://movie-critics.ew.com/2009/09/14/toronto-whip-it/>

When you see the gripping documentary *The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers*, you realize that the saga of the Pentagon Papers may be every bit the equal of Watergate in its moral urgency and almost seismic drama. Ellsberg, a defense analyst who worked with Robert McNamara and believed in the Vietnam War (he even served a tour of duty there), began, by 1965, to question the escalating intensity of Lyndon Johnson’s bombing campaign. When the Rand Corporation — the government-sanctioned corporate think tank — was commissioned to document America’s relationship with Vietnam going back to 1945, what Ellsberg

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learned is that the region had a secret history. The U.S. had been fighting Communism there ever since the '50s, when it backed the French Colonialists. Vietnam, he discovered, had always been our war, handed off from one publicly duplicitous president to the next.

The Most Dangerous Man in America takes the form of a classic whistleblower tale, as Ellsberg, droopy and handsome, tormented by his conscience, undergoes the political equivalent of a religious conversion, coming around to the view that he must do whatever it takes to stop the war. He decides to leak the Rand Corporation report, all seven thousand pages of it, to the New York Times. Just Xeroxing the thing takes months — he even enlists his kids — but when he finally delivers the documents to the Times, the drama is just beginning. A government crackdown ensues, and by the time that's over, seventeen newspapers have agreed to publish the Pentagon Papers. It's literally a case of the press declaring itself, newspaper by newspaper, to be free. The Most Dangerous Man in America shows you that the Pentagon Papers was really the first chapter of Watergate, the trigger that drove Richard Nixon to take the law into his own hands. What's really shocking, though, is that Hollywood never made a movie out of this one.

NY Post

V.A. Musetto

September 16, 2009

http://www.nypost.com/p/entertainment/movies/vietnam_era_misdeeds_back_in_spotlight_2cnWDluzWOcCMxrRIX1UgM

THE most exciting thriller I've seen in a while contains nary a car chase and doesn't feature Will Smith.

In fact, the film is a documentary: "The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers," which is as powerful as anything Hollywood can throw at us.

Directed by Judith Ehrlich and Rick Goldsmith, the film tells how Ellsberg risked spending the rest of his life in prison to tell the American people how a mountain of lies by five presidents, from Truman to Nixon, fueled the US war in Vietnam.

But that wasn't all. Ellsberg, more indirectly, helped bring down Nixon, who resigned as liar-in-chief in 1974 as he faced possible impeachment over the Watergate break-in at Democratic National Headquarters and its subsequent coverup.

The Pentagon Papers was the name given to a top-secret study by the RAND Corp., which detailed decades of misleading statements about Vietnam from the White House.

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Ellsberg smuggled the papers out of RAND, the military think tank where he worked. The story is largely narrated by Ellsberg, now in his late 70s, with an assist from his wife, Patricia.

In addition, the directors employ talking heads, old newsreel footage, re-creations, quotes from audio tapes Nixon made of himself in the Oval Office — even animation.

We know what is going to happen: The Supreme Court will rule that the New York Times, the Washington Post and other newspapers can print the Pentagon Papers; Ellsberg will be indicted for violating the Espionage Act, and he will be cleared.

Still, the facts unroll with the same urgency as if they were brand-new.

It was Henry Kissinger who called Ellsberg “the most dangerous man in America.” (Nixon, never one to mince words, said he was “a son of a bitch.”) Others would call Ellsberg a national hero.

The New Yorker

David Denby

http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/cinema/2009/09/07/090907crici_cinema_denby?currentPage=2

On August 4, 1964, the first day of his employment in Robert S. McNamara’s Department of Defense, Daniel Ellsberg received cables describing an attack on American ships in the Gulf of Tonkin by North Vietnamese torpedo boats. The American commander in the gulf cast doubt on the report a few hours later, and within days it was clear that no such attack had taken place. Yet President Lyndon B. Johnson used the event to persuade Congress to pass the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, which was the overt beginning of an American commitment that lasted eleven years. Ellsberg had been a Marine officer in the fifties and then an employee of the Rand Corporation, a military think tank; he was a fervent cold warrior. In 1966, eager to see how the war was going, he led an infantry company as a civilian in the Northern Mekong Delta. Out on point with several other men, he suddenly came under fire from some Vietcong who had been hiding in the water alongside the company, and were now behind him. He and his men couldn’t fire on the Vietnamese without possibly hitting Americans farther back in the column. As a result of that incident and many other small instances of Vietcong daring, he realized that the war couldn’t be won and that he had to do something about stopping it.

“The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers” (opening September 16th) dramatizes a kind of secular spiritual journey—from warrior to anti-warrior, from analyst to activist, from patriot to “traitor.” Ellsberg himself, now in his late seventies, describes the stages of this transformation with his usual precision and ardor, and the filmmakers, Judith Ehrlich and Rick Goldsmith, fill in events with news footage and rather hokey re-creations of Ellsberg’s actions (a man in shadow speaking

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into a telephone, etc.). As a young man, Ellsberg, with Paul Newman blue eyes and a slight touch of mischief beneath the grave exterior, was so attractive that he made sobriety seem charismatic. The movie is an act of hero worship, but it inadvertently suggests that, without a necessary touch of grandiosity, Ellsberg might never have acted as bravely as he did. The top-secret Pentagon Papers, which he released to the Times, in 1971, did not, in fact, contain current military secrets—the papers were an extended history of America's involvement in Vietnam, revealing that various Administrations had lied to the public about what they were doing. In the movie's juiciest moments, we hear excerpts from Richard Nixon's reaction to Ellsberg (taped in the Oval Office), which display the President at his low-minded and vicious worst. The movie sets the two of them up as opponents, and implies that Ellsberg won the contest—that he was the force that caused Nixon to implode in Watergate and the war finally to end. That may be giving Ellsberg more credit than is due, but it's good to hear that gravelly, meticulous voice again explain why he could not absolve himself of responsibility for anything that he had done in his life. How many powerful men think that way?

Toronto Star

Vietnam whistle-blower revels in his new role

<http://www.thestar.com/entertainment/tiff/article/694701>

It's been 38 years since Daniel Ellsberg rocked the United States by leaking the Pentagon Papers to The New York Times – revealing to the world that several U.S. presidents had been lying to the public.

Now at age 78, Ellsberg is in Toronto as the star and protagonist of a riveting documentary called *The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers*, which had its world premiere last night at the Toronto International Film Festival.

Yesterday, when I had lunch with Ellsberg, his wife Patricia, and the co-producers/writers of the film, Judith Ehrlich and Rick Goldsmith, I took the opportunity to ask the obvious: Why now?

After all, the Pentagon Papers saga has all the ingredients of a great documentary, and it benefits hugely from Ellsberg's own charismatic personality as he narrates the story. But surely the film could have been made long ago.

"Well, there are at least 97 good reasons," says Ellsberg. "One of them is that I didn't want to seem to be cashing in on my celebrity. But a more important one is the striking correspondence between what happened in Vietnam back then and what is happening with Afghanistan right now."

Ellsberg has no doubt there are other people in high places sitting on the kind of explosive information about Afghanistan that Ellsberg leaked about Vietnam.

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"(Barack) Obama sounds like a fool when he talks about Afghanistan as a necessary war," says Ellsberg. He says there are advisers who are holding back the facts – including, in his view, that even hundreds of thousands of U.S. troops taking over the country for 10 years would not be enough to defeat the Taliban.

But *The Most Dangerous Man in America* is not a film about Afghanistan or Obama. It's the story of how Ellsberg was converted from a committed Cold War liberal to a devastatingly effective foe of the war in Vietnam.

In the 1960s, as a Harvard graduate and former marine officer, he was a brilliant researcher at the RAND Corporation, a military think-tank, and a true believer who was confident the Vietnam War was a way of defending democracy against Stalinist dictatorship.

Given the highest level of security clearance, he helped provide Lyndon Johnson, the U.S. president, with the kind of information he needed. But Ellsberg knew that reports about alleged North Vietnamese aggression in the Bay of Tonkin were phony. In 1971, Ellsberg leaked secret documents to *The New York Times* revealing that several U.S. presidents – Johnson, John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon – had been lying for years about Vietnam. "It is not just that we were on the wrong side," says Ellsberg. "We were the wrong side."

It soon became obvious just who was responsible for the leak, and according to Ellsberg, that turned him into a leper.

Ellsberg was even charged with espionage – and faced the real possibility of spending the rest of his life in prison. But the case was thrown out of court and the public eventually realized that the Vietnam War was a horrible folly.

Now Ellsberg revels in being a *persona non grata* in top government, military and academic circles. And far from dwelling in the past, he is working to prevent his country from what he sees as another mistake in Afghanistan.

"In Vietnam we thought we could succeed where the French failed. In Afghanistan, we seem to think we can succeed where the Russians failed. There must be books by Russians about what went wrong in Afghanistan. Have any of them been translated? We should be reading them and learning from them."

The Hollywood Reporter

By Chris Barsanti, September 17, 2009

<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/hr/film-reviews/the-most-dangerous-man-in-america-daniel-1004013715.story>

Bottom Line: This straightforward history lesson casts Daniel Ellsberg and his leaked Pentagon Papers as the first shot in the war that brought down the Nixon regime.

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NEW YORK -- After seeing Judith Ehrlich and Rick Goldsmith's earnest, smart documentary about Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers controversy, viewers not old enough when it unfolded might wonder why the story has played such a minor role in popular histories of the era. This informative account deserves more than the very limited theatrical release it's likely to get.

Ellsberg's story (of which he narrates large parts) is similar to that of many intellectuals recruited into Washington's cadre of wunderkinds only to find themselves with the blood of Vietnam all over their hands.

Brilliant and competitive, Ellsberg was a top policy analyst in the military industrial complex more interested in game theory and puzzle-solving than waging war.

Symbolically, the Gulf of Tonkin incident erupted on his very first day at the Pentagon under Robert McNamara. From then on, Ellsberg -- a lean and professorial type with a David Strathairn gravity to him -- was propelled deeper and deeper into planning of the war he later came to despise.

A true-blue anti-communist and former Marine, Ellsberg was no desk wonk: He headed into the South Vietnamese deltas and jungles to dig up data firsthand, even if it meant going into actual combat. Ellsberg ultimately learned enough about the war -- particularly how badly it was going and how inhumanely it was being fought -- that he couldn't ignore his doubts any longer.

Though their visual language tends toward hokey reenactments and no-frills talking-head dialogue, the filmmakers do an astounding job relating how Ellsberg brought the Pentagon Papers -- which laid out in plain language how the Pentagon and White House had been lying to the public about the war -- to light.

From smuggling the thousands of top-secret documents out of the Rand Corporation to the breathtaking race to publish them in more newspapers than the government could get injunctions against (vitriolic audiotapes reveal a vicious Nixon raging in full splutter, "We've got to get this son of a bitch!"), it's a thrilling journalistic drama, easily the equal of *Deep Throat*.

If nothing else, "The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers" strongly makes the point that without Ellsberg's breach in the dam, Nixon might never have been paranoid enough to get his team of plumbers to raid Ellsberg's doctor's office, which laid the groundwork for their later break-ins at the Watergate.

Although visually a minimally budgeted public television-style documentary, "The Most Dangerous Man" offers a brisk and eye-opening approach to recent history. The title, by the way, comes from Henry Kissinger.

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LA Times

September 23, 2009

Gary Goldstein

<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/news/la-et-most-dangerous23-2009sep23,0,7922008.story>

In 1971, Daniel Ellsberg, a former Marine, Pentagon employee and military analyst, performed one of the most daring whistle-blowing acts of the century: Leaking ex-employer Rand Corp.'s copies of the top-secret Pentagon Papers to the New York Times (and subsequently other major dailies) in order to expose the truth -- or, more specifically, the lies -- behind America's longtime involvement in the Vietnam conflict. The gripping story of how hawk-turned-dove Ellsberg's explosive actions circuitously led to the impeachment of Richard Nixon and, in turn, an end to the Vietnam War is comprehensively detailed in Judith Ehrlich and Rick Goldsmith's evocative documentary "The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers."

Fortunately, the staunchly committed and controversial Ellsberg, now 78, is still around to tell his history-making tale, and he lends the film gravitas as both its persuasive narrator and primary talking head. Cogent interviews with journalists, lawyers, historians and other surviving Pentagon Papers players augment Ellsberg's chronicle, with a wide array of archival photos and news footage providing vital visual support. Parallels to more recent U.S. military imbroglios, though judiciously low-key here, are eerily evident.

But it is the audio from the infamous Nixon tapes, in which the then-president rails in monstrous fashion against Ellsberg, that supplies the film's most chilling -- and perversely entertaining -- moments.

NY Magazine

David Edelstein

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<http://nymag.com/movies/reviews/59007/>

Two films depict wildly disparate whistle-blowers: Steven Soderbergh's true-ish comedy *The Informant!* and Judith Ehrlich and Rick Goldsmith's documentary *The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers*. What a contrast: a limp burlesque and a straight-ahead, enthralling story of moral courage.

The Most Dangerous Man in America also centers on an insider who attempted, in vain, to reconcile his career and his conscience. But this story changed the world. I'm ashamed to admit I knew so little about Ellsberg, a marine who studied decision-making under duress, fought the Cold War fight against Stalinist dictatorships, then traveled from Santa Monica, California, and the Rand Corporation to the Mekong Delta. There he saw firsthand that the Vietnam War was unwinnable, made the case to his superiors, and watched in shock as they lied their asses off. The more he studied the history of Southeast Asia, the more he saw that all the presidents lied: Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy,

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Johnson, and finally Nixon, who campaigned on a platform of stopping the war while in private vowing to hammer “this shit-ass little country.” Narrated by Ellsberg, the movie offers one revelatory interview after another mixed with reenactments (animated) that have fun with the caper-movie aspect and build real suspense. So many people risked their livelihoods to put the 7,000-page Pentagon Papers out there—although its most tangible result was the creation of Nixon’s plumbers unit. We have not celebrated Daniel Ellsberg enough. Let’s begin.

The New York Times

Mike Hale

September 16, 2009

The Untold Story of a War and the Story of the Man Who Told It

<http://movies.nytimes.com/2009/09/16/movies/16dangerous.html>

As “The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers” begins, a sonorous voice describes American actions during the Vietnam War. It sounds a bit like that of Peter Coyote, a frequent narrator of documentaries with a liberal bent. Then the voice says “I,” and you realize that it’s Daniel Ellsberg, narrating his own story.

There’s no doubt where “Dangerous” stands when it comes to Mr. Ellsberg, the man who leaked the secret history of the war, known as the Pentagon Papers, to newspapers, including The New York Times. On the spectrum from heroic patriot to craven traitor, this detailed, clearly told and persuasive film, directed by Judith Ehrlich and Rick Goldsmith, is firmly on the side of heroic. It conscientiously notes the viewpoints of those who believe that Mr. Ellsberg betrayed his country or his former colleagues at the Defense Department, which prepared the report. But when the two sides are represented by the formidably intelligent, reasoned, now grandfatherly tones of Mr. Ellsberg on the one hand, and the taped, heavily bleeped rants of President Richard M. Nixon on the other, it’s not much of a contest.

One problem the filmmakers have, in fact, is that the narrative of Mr. Ellsberg’s disillusionment and of the subsequent First Amendment battle after he leaked the papers is so familiar, and its lessons regarding government malfeasance so accepted, that it has become an official story in its own right. Ms. Ehrlich and Mr. Goldsmith try to jack up the tension with moody Errol Morris-style shots of telephones, safes and briefcases, but they’re just distracting.

Yet there’s still sufficient drama in the details to keep you hooked — like Mr. Ellsberg’s account of the many nights of surreptitious photocopying required to get the 7,000-page study out into the world, or James Goodale’s memories of how, as general counsel of The Times, he pushed the newspaper’s management to publish it.

As the documentary progresses, the parallels between the events it describes and subsequent behavior by American administrations during conflicts in Central America and the Middle East are mostly left unspoken. Many viewers, however, will come away

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with a depressing sense of history repeating itself, and Mr. Ellsberg sounds that note himself, asking why the lessons of Vietnam and Watergate seemed to fade so quickly.

The filmmakers, meanwhile, concentrate on their portrait of Mr. Ellsberg, who emerges as a complex and difficult man whose principles, whether you agree with them or not, can't be denied.