

'The Trial of the Chicago 7' makes a powerful argument

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «««« out of «««««

Running Time: 130 minutes

This film will be available for streaming on Netflix, Oct. 16.

The late 1960s were a tumultuous period in U.S. history, filled with massive demonstrations and counterculture protests against the Vietnam War. One of many events that garnered attention was the 1968 Democratic National Convention. In fact, the biggest news story broke outside the conference center after an incident at one of the rallies resulted in turmoil. In 1969, eight men were charged with crimes in connection with the protests, including conspiracy and inciting a riot.

The Trial of the Chicago 7 tells the story of the shocking legal battle that followed.

High-ranking government officials met with Federal Prosecutor Richard Schultz (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) and gave him a mandate to charge attendees from multiple factions. The targets included Tom Hayden (Eddie Redmayne), Abbie Hoffman (Sacha Baron Cohen), Rennie Davis (Alex Sharp) and several other famous faces involved in the movement. Another figure tried

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was Black Panthers chairman, Bobby Seale (Yahya Abdul-Mateen II), whose connections to the unrest were even less clear. Defense attorney William Kunstler (Mark Rylance) was hired to represent several of those under indictment, but found the job exceptionally difficult because of the judge (Frank Langella) who presided over the case.

The lawyer also mediated between group members who had different thoughts and opinions about how to proceed.

While movies set largely around a courtroom environment can be dry and don't always play out as tense or exciting affairs, this picture certainly bucks the trend. This is because the story involves a roomful of notable and distinctive characters who butt heads with everyone ... sometimes even those within their own group. At times there was arguing between multiple parties all within the same scene and location. There's continual conflict on display throughout, as the case becomes increasingly confrontational.

Writer/director Aaron Sorkin (creator of the TV series *The West Wing* and the director of *Money ball*) cleverly constructs the tale to help viewers slowly piece together what transpired. While much of the material occurs in court as witnesses are questioned, their answers are intercut with flashbacks to specific interactions. The technique works very well, adding energy to the storytelling and delivering information in a dramatic fashion. Sorkin also has a knack for sharp and incisive dialogue.

Every individual has their own quirks and flaws, as well as different approaches to getting their message across. Some are earnest in their protest and outrage, while others try to use humor to show disdain for the government. It's fascinating to watch them use different methods as they stand up for their ideals as individuals and as a collective whole.

While the screenplay is remarkably strong, a movie like this also depends on its cast. Once again, the movie delivers with an incredible ensemble, and each performer excels. This includes Cohen's excellent rendering of the sharp-witted Hoffman and Redmayne's more conservative Hayden, who seemingly isn't as bold or brash as the others on trial. Admittedly, there are far too many characters to deal with in this story and not all of them get the attention they deserve.

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However, the fast-paced dialogue and the performances create a zippy pace that never lags in spite of the familiar court setting, and the fact that the drama revolves around recollections of a past event.

Naturally, this movie also benefits from an important message that feels just as relevant today as it did decades ago. This is a slick, polished feature, but there are potent and strong moments over the course of the running time that really hit the mark and elicit an emotional response. *The Trial of the Chicago 7*

is one of the stronger films to come down the pipeline in recent weeks. It will shock, infuriate, and ultimately inspire viewers with its impressive storytelling and powerful arguments.

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