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ARTS

Not to be overlooked

HUAC investigates communist sympathizers in Hollywood

by Greg B. Somer

Guilty by Suspicion directed by Martin Scorsese Warner Bros.

Guilty by Suspicion is based on a dark period in Hollywood history.

During the early 50s, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) was in full swing, investigating suspected Communist involvement among people in the motion picture industry. Many individuals were coerced into testifying as witnesses against their colleagues, who may or not have been directly associated with subversive Communist intentions. Those neglecting to testify were placed on the "Hollywood Blacklist" which scarred their professional reputations.

Film director, David Merrill (Robert De Niro), faces a disturbing dilemma. If he testifies, future opportunities, initiated by giant studio moguls, will allow him to further his career, but unfortunately, many of his co-workers may fall victim to the committee's punishment (i.e. prison terms, and loss of the right to earn a living . . .). On the other hand, if he refuses to testify, the FBI will continue to pursue him until their needs are met.

Torn between his obsession for his trade and his obligation to those close to him, he wrestles with his conscience, then decides not to comply with the committee's demands.

As Merrill becomes increasingly belligerent, he's shocked to find that those he once depended on now reject him in an effort to protect their own reputations. If seen with him, they could be labelled as suspected Communists.

At this time, Merrill receives his sole source of strength from his family, whom he had previously neglected. His ex-wife Ruth (*The Grif-*

ters' Annette Bening) provided the emotional stability he needs, while his 10-year-old son gives him the chance to become a better father figure. These touching family scenes are natural and refreshing, contrasting the film's taut dramatic elements.

Another complimentary subplot involves Merrill's relationship with his close friend, screenwriter Bunny Baxter.

Played by George Wendt, Bunny displays great down to earth honesty.

Wendt, who is best known as beer-guzzling Norm Peterson on TV's *Cheers*, expands his potential as a man desperate to save his own skin when the committee closes in on him.

Patricia Wettig (TV's *Thirtysomething*) adds an unexpected dramatic element as Dorothy, a tragic victim of the committee's motives. As is the case with Wendt, it is great to see Wettig surpass her melodramatic television role.

To save the best for last, De Niro outshines everyone in the film, with his convincing portrayal of David Merrill. Right from the film's opening, he earns our sympathy with his sincerity and loyalty when he adamantly refuses to label his friends as communists.

Guilty by Suspicion, has one noticeable weakness. Despite their strengths, all the main characters, with the exception of Merrill, are rather contrived and one-dimensional. However, if one considers the simplified storyline, such characters may pose as necessary plot requirements.

The highlight of the film is its climactic courtroom confrontation which inevitably sweeps us towards a resounding conclusion.

One of the most intriguing films of the season, *Guilty by Suspicion* is not to be overlooked.



Film director David Merrill (played by Robert De Niro) has some hard choices to make in 1950's Hollywood.

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