

L.A. Confidential

It has been said that to every story there are two sides. But if the story being told is intricate enough, one quickly learns that there are often more than simply two sides to anything. And more than that, things are often more complicated than you may have previously thought. Things in the real world are not just black & white, cut and dry, infinitely good or infinitely evil. Instead, they may exist somewhere in between, hidden in the misty haze of what we consider to be right and wrong. This is the central theme of L.A. Confidential. *the "grey!"*

This noir film is a cynically twisted, yet convincing realistic look at what we have come to know as the Hollywood Myth, ~~The~~ idea that somewhere there is a perfect world, a paradise untouched by the corruption of greedy and immoral people, a place where everyone stands with, or against truth and justice, and a place where "the man in the white hat" sets everything right in the end. As most of us learn, this simply isn't the truth of things, nor was it ever.

Everything about the film plays directly upon this myth. It is set in the optimistic L.A. of the 1950's, when the growing metropolis was still considered to be the "City of the Future" and during a period of American history that is often looked back upon by some as a blissful age of innocence. Hidden under this glamorous exterior is the darker reality of a seedy town, full of corruption, greed, bigotry, and yes ... even murder.

The power of the film is found first in the twisted storyline, and second in the characters entrenched within it. Each character seems to play a role fairly familiar to the average viewing audience, but as the film progresses each scene takes us further into the complexity of these characters until finally we are forced to reevaluate our first impressions of them.

We are presented with an ambitious "straight arrow" character in the form of Ed Exley (Guy Pierce), a rookie cop, who believes firmly in the noble notions of legal justice and due process under the law. But early into the film, we develop a slight distaste for him because of his naivety and his apparent lack of loyalty to his fellow officers. We believe him to be a noble character, but certainly not the perfect good guy we are accustomed to.

Second, we are introduced to Bud White (Russell Crowe), a veteran cop who knows the stark and messy truth of the hidden Los Angeles. He also appears to fight for the ideal of justice, but we develop a distaste for him because of his blatant disregard for the ethics of the law he represents. He is an aggressive, somewhat torment ^{er} man, who harbors a distinctive view of justice that borders on vigilantism. He is a strong counterpoint to Ed Exley.

Next comes Jack Vincennes (Kevin Spacey), a cynical veteran cop, who indulges in the glamorous social scenes of Hollywood, even being a technical advisor on a Dragnet-like television show. He takes cash on the side from a sleazy tabloid journalist known as Sid Hudgeans (Danny Devito), who pays Jack to set up Hollywood stars and socialites for damaging and embarrassing photo-busts. After the murder of one of his busties, Jack becomes a haunted character. As the story progresses he gradually goes through a transition, finally realizing the depths to which he has sunk and attempts to redeem himself by assisting Ed in the pursuit of the mystery killer, whom he believes to also be the killer of the bustie.

Finally, the central cast is completed by Lynn Bracken (Kim Basinger), who is a high paid hooker who develops a love affair with Bud. She has been made-up to look like a well known actress and pimped out to high paying customers who want to have sex with a Hollywood look-a-like. We naturally see her in a negative light, considering her profession, but we slowly learn that somewhere there is a small piece of her yearning for innocence. Her made-up self, is exactly that, a made-up person hiding the real one she is inside.

This brings us back to the idea of the Hollywood Myth. Each character in the story gradually comes to face their own personal truth, as horrible as each may be. In director/co-writer Curtis Hanson's Los Angeles, image is everything, and he uses the twisted plot to reveal several misconceptions we have about not only the city, but American life as well. Racial stereotypes are not only presented throughout the film, but are also used as tools to propel the story along. Furthermore, they aid in distracting the audience, who quickly becomes wrapped up in the events surrounding the mass murder at the Night Owl diner. We know that these events appear to be related to the murders, but yet for most of the film they seem to be too convenient to be the whole truth. Additionally, there are several inconsistencies that make us wonder if we are getting the whole story and force us to ask why these murders were committed at all. It is these inconsistencies and questions that prompt Bud, Ed, and Jack to independently search for

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real truth.

All of this is presented in an extremely effective style. One technique used consistently throughout the film is image and sound overlay. Many scenes are shot in such a way as to show characters partaking in dialogue, while a transparent onlooker silently observes through a mirror or window. Several scenes, such as the interrogation of the Negro rapists, incorporate a sound montage into this technique, where we hear the officers reflected in the mirror proclaiming the presumed guilt of the accused. Another technique is the use of bright high photography. This is a constant reminder of the "image is everything" concept.

Since this is a film noir, many scenes are characteristically dark, full of deep browns, greys, and blacks. The cinematography uses an eloquent mixture of high contrast and low key lighting to set the mood of this mystery thriller. Long shafts of light are used in abundance and effectively draw the audience deeper into the tale. This is well rounded by an enthralling musical score, including a variety of well known nostalgia songs and even Christmas carols. Instead of lighting the mood, they help to increase the darkness and hypocrisy of the events unfolding before us.

The editing is done wonderfully, the film moves smoothly from event to event, inviting the audience to look deeper into the story. The action scenes are sharp and brutal, with little glamor added to the harsh violence. Though I will admit the final confrontation makes for one powerful and exciting gun battle.

In conclusion, L.A. Confidential is a tale of deceit and manipulation. It is an exposure of our desire for a fantasy world, yet it carries with it a positive grain of truth. Often our take on events is skewed by our own selfish desire for a world of blissful innocence. While this may naturally seem appealing at first glance, a mature acceptance of the truth is by far a more noble state of being.

I give L.A. Confidential three stars (***) , though I am tempted to give it four. The only reason I don't, is because I reserve the highest acclaim possible, for films which has in some way inspired me to change my life in one way or another. L.A. Confidential didn't do that, but it did promote me to reflect upon an issue that I believe to be of importance in our growing "Media" culture: The issue of the Hollywood Myth, and all that comes with it.

(I give it 3 1/2)

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