



Did You Know?

The film was guided by Dr. Philip Zimbardo. The head of the original Stanford Prison Experiment.

In 2001 I was completely blown away by Oliver Hirschbiegel's (13 Minutes) Das Experiment, a German film depicting the events of the 1971 Stanford Experiment. I was surprised there was no American version of this even considering it took place in the states, but seeing it fleshed out on screen was pretty amazing. Maybe a little too amazing, but captivating.

Later in 2010 Paul Scheuring (Prison Break) gave us the remake of Das Experiment which starred Forest Whitaker (Southpaw) and Adrian Brody (The Grand Budapest Hotel). The film was a direct to DVD flop that got little fanfare.

2015 offer a new adaptation from director Kyle Patrick Alvarez (Easier With Practice) from the screenplay by Tim Talbott (Chicago Fire). The film stars Billy Crudup (Almost Famous), Michael Angarano (Almost Famous), Olivia Thirlby (The Wedding Ringer), and a slew of other familiar names.

Compared to the previous films on the same subject, The Stanford Prison Experiment feels more like a straight forward, no fantasy, Christopher Nolan-like (The Dark Knight) approach. Nothing is over dramatized about TSPE.

When the film opens up there's a sense of comic relief as the prisoners and guards begin to fill in their rolls. The music only adds to the feeling, which I felt was a touch of genius in making me, the viewer, feel like the whole thing was going to play out like a joke. That must have been what the original candidates must have felt before things went sideways.

The build up for the films spiral felt a bit long. There are so many prisoners and so many guards, and no one really has a name or specific personality but maybe two or three that it's hard to find the proper emotional attachment to any of them which makes it hard to really immerse yourself in the experiment and the effects that unfold. It also doesn't help that the film is playing on three different levels. You have the guards, the prisoners, and you have the faculty of the experiment. Talbott and Alvarez try to connect them all in some meaningful fashion, but it's too much information, even for the 2+ hour runtime.

I think if your looking for a bare bones look at The Stanford Prison Experiment as a no frills, no thrills type of peek, then this is for you. Honestly though. Who wants that? There is so little excitement in the film that it actually feels more like a made for television documentary movie. The acting of the younger cast is also a bit underpar, for the amount of screen time any one actor gets. Overall, not the best adaptation of these events in my opinion.

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