

# Screen: 'Storm Center'

## Bette Davis Star of Film at Normandie

By BOSLEY CROWTHER

IN their film called "Storm Center," Julian Blaustein and Daniel Taradash have tackled a theme that is drawn from the coals of smoldering conflict and political passion in American life today. That is the theme of freedom to circulate ideas and the damage that can be done to an individual and to a community when this freedom is abridged.

The issue presented in this picture, which came to the Normandie on Saturday, is that of a woman librarian who refuses to remove a book called "The Communist Dream" from her public library when the city council tells her to. As a consequence of her refusal, one of the councilmen implies she is a "Red," which leads to her discharge as librarian and her belittlement in the community. From all that is evident in the picture, the lady is innocent of the charge.

Stated thus bluntly, the issue appears undeniably stacked, and no one, outside a rabid scare-head, is likely to say the lady has not been cruelly used. The villainy of the councilman, thus put forth, is as plain as if he stroked a black mustache.

Yet this is the way producer Blaustein and writer-director Taradash have stated the issue—bluntly. And even more bluntly, they have shown the sheepishness of the citizens in shunning the librarian. No subtle or tenuous circumstances as might be likely in such a situation are touched, and thus the crisis seems less a real-life issue than a hypothetical case put in a tract.

This is too bad, because the purpose and courage of the men who made this film not only are to be commended but also deserve concrete rewards. They have opened a subject that is touchy and urgent in contemporary life. It should

## The Cast

STORM CENTER, story and screen play by Daniel Taradash and Nick Moll; directed by Mr. Taradash and produced by Julian Blaustein; a Phoenix Production presented by Columbia. At the Normandie.

Alicia Hull	Bette Davis
Paul Duncan	Brian Keith
Martha Lockridge	Kim Hunter
Judge Robert Ellerbe	Paul Kelly
Freddie Slater	Kevin Coughlin
George Slater	Joe Mantell
Laura Slater	Sally Brophy
Mayor Levering	Howard Wierum
Stacey Martin	Curtis Cooksey
Edgar Greenbaum	Michael Raffetto
Reverend Wilson	Edward Platt
Hazel	Kathryn Grant

be presented so adroitly that it would fascinate and move people deeply.

Furthermore, they have got from Bette Davis a fearless and forceful performance as the middle-aged widowed librarian who stands by her principles. Miss Davis makes the prim but stalwart lady human and credible. Brian Keith as the councilman who "smears" her seems an improvising actor in her shade, and Paul Kelly looks an intellectual misfit as her easily manipulated friend.

Finally, Messrs. Blaustein and Taradash do put a stern thought in this film, which is that the fears and suspicions of our age are most likely to corrupt and scar the young. By showing the effect of the fulminations of a narrow-minded father upon his sensitive, bookish son, they suggest the unrealized peril of extending contemporary terrors into tomorrow. And by having this boy, in his confusion, set fire to the library, they point up the irony of book-burning in a trenchant, apocalyptic way.

However, again the thesis is much better than the putting forth of it. The visualization of this drama is clumsy and abrupt. And neither Joe Mantell as the father nor Kevin Coughlin as the boy act with the natural mannerisms and anxieties of truly upset folks.

Mr. Blaustein and Mr. Taradash have tried nobly, but they have failed to develop a film that whips up dramatic excitement or flames with passion in support of its theme.