



Journalism Movies

See Bottom for Content Revisions and the list of movies I want.

If you enjoy this, you may also enjoy my essay on [Women in Journalism](#), [Journalism Books](#) and [Journalism Quotes](#).

You are visitor number

6736

since Nov. 14, 1996

You can reach me at PAUL@SCHINDLER.ORG

This page will look its best if viewed with Internet Explorer 2.0 or a version of Netscape after 1.2.

Thank you for visiting this page. My hobby is collecting old journalism movies on VHS videotape. I don't mind anyone lifting material from this page, with credit, or better yet, creating a link to it from their page. All I ask for is credit.

Table of Contents

[Getting Started In Journalism](#)

[Musing Philosophical on the Image of Journalists](#)

[My Feelings About Journalism Movies](#)

[The Best Journalism Movie Ever: The Paper](#)

[Deadline USA](#)

[-30-](#)

[The Front Page](#)

[His Girl Friday](#)
[Switching Channels](#)
[Absence of Malice](#)
[Blessed Event](#)
[The Big Clock](#)
[I Love Trouble](#)
[Up Close and Personal](#)
[Broadcast News](#)
[All The President's Men](#)
[The Insider](#)
[The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture \(IJPC\)](#)

Collecting journalism movies is a hobby which merges two of my **major** interests: **journalism** (I have been a journalist since 1970) and **movies** (You can find my movie reviews in the index for 1971-74 under Paul Schindler and P.E. Schindler Jr. at [MIT's The Tech](#) in the historic archives). I still see about 40 movies a year, compared to the average American who, according to the Motion Picture Producers Association, sees 4). I have tried to make this list as comprehensive as possible, but I have my own definition of journalism movies.

For example, the famous Clark Gable film, **It Happened One Night**, is **NOT** on my list. In that film, Gable plays a reporter. But he never acts like a reporter, and except to set up the comedy, his profession is meaningless in the context of the film.

To make my list, a film must be **ABOUT** a journalist and feature that journalist actually performing journalism. Some of the films on this page come from reference works or another Internet Page so I can't say for certain that all of them meet my criteria.

The Best Journalism Movie Page Besides This One

There's a new best journalism movie page on the web, and I'm not just saying that because it [mentions my page](#). Check out the resource page, the book, the excerpts from the book and especially the IJPC Journal.

[The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture \(IJPC\)](#)

a Project of the Norman Lear Center

Director: Joe Saltzman, associate dean and professor of journalism

The Annenberg School for Communication, University of Southern California.

Mission: To investigate and analyze, through research and publication, the conflicting images of the journalist in film, television, radio, commercials, cartoons, and fiction, demonstrating their impact on the American public's perception of newsgatherers.

[More on The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture \(IJPC\)](#)

The second best Journalism Movie page I once saw is back!

[Journalists in Movies](#) has rather more Finnish in it that I prefer, but it is worth a look. It is maintained by Kaarina Melakoski, Senior Lecturer, Print media and Web journalism, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication University of Tampere, Finland.

There is a **wonderful** journalism movie page, [Detroit Free Press Journalism Movie Page](#) that inspired me to spruce up my site by adding some stills (with more to come over time). The Freep page includes films that don't meet my definition of a journalism movie (and some that do which I merely haven't chosen to write about yet). I assume that, since publicity stills were originally issued for royalty-free use by newspapers and magazines it is OK to reproduce them. So I have lifted some of the movie stills on this page from the **Freep** site. If someone knows differently, please write and let me know. But it would have to be one heck of an argument, given the circumstances under which publicity stills are released in the first place.

Since this is essentially a database listing of my collection and the films I'd like to own, there are a few television shows thrown in. Someday, if time permits, I may start a collection of American Journalism television programs, but I suspect collecting journalism movies will be the work of a lifetime.

If you know a journalism movie you think I have missed, or spot an error on this list, please let me know and I will correct it/add it. I have annotated a few of my personal favorites; skip to the end of the file if you wish to see my notes. You can reach me at paul@schindler.org.

You can browse my movie library two ways. You can use "find" to look up books in the [HTML table version](#), or your can right click [if you are in Internet Explorer on a Windows computer] and download the [Rich Text Format version](#) (can be read in Word,

Wordperfect, and most MAC word processors), then resort the table in whatever order interests you.

I used to think it was the height of pretentiousness to put your library on the Internet, until I sat down and thought about how much useful information I've gotten from the many bibliographies on the Internet. Admittedly, it's just a list and not an annotated bibliography, but I hope it will help you. And, as I said before, feel free to write. This is what the Internet is all about, in my opinion. People sharing information across time and space.

The Best Movies

And other commentary

Getting Started In Journalism

A couple of years ago, I spotted this in a book of columns by Mayes, the Readers' Editor (in the U.S., we'd call him an Ombudsman) for **The Guardian**. It is one of the most sensible things I have ever read. If you want to be a journalist, or know someone who does, follow the link and read the whole column.

[Scoop dreams](#)

[The Readers' Editor on starting out in journalism](#)

Ian Mayes

Saturday October 23, 1999

The Guardian

...I recall the conversation between the young Bateson in Evelyn Waugh's **Scoop** (quoting from which I acknowledge as a weakness) when he went to meet William Boot at the station on his return to London: "But do you think it's a good way of training oneself - inventing imaginary news?" "None better," said William.

Personally, I find all this so exciting that I almost wish I were going round again, I mean in journalism, of

course, although I would, I hope, do some things differently (who was it who said, "If life had a second edition, how I would correct the proofs"?). [according to the Internet, the line was uttered by John Clare (1793 - 1864), a "preasant poet" who spent the more than a third of his life in insane asylums]

...

One generation has always felt it detected a decline in standards in the succeeding one. One of the great Guardian writers, Neville Cardus, said in his Autobiography: "It was not possible to get into print in those days [c1908] if you could not write good English. 'Can you write?' was the first thing asked by editors of young men when they were being interviewed after applying for a job as a junior reporter. Today, editors as a rule do not raise this question." He wrote that in, or at least it was published in, 1947.

...

A final thought, from the Italian poet, Petrarch: "Many have not become what they might have because they believed they were what people mistakenly said they were." Thanks again, and good luck.

Musing Philosophical on the Image of Journalists

A University of Kentucky journalism student wrote to me and asked some questions about the image of journalists. Here's how I responded (her questions are in bold):

I would like to know your take on how you feel Journalism is portrayed in film, is it real and authentic to what a journalist can expect throughout his/her career?

Interestingly enough, the answer to your question is yes and no. Yes, some depictions of journalism on film are real and authentic (not, for example, Julia Roberts' wardrobe in "I Love Trouble," or the big red button in "The Paper"), but no they are not what a journalist can expect throughout his/her career.

The key to understanding this conundrum is a bit of wisdom I learned from a script writing class. A movie is always about the most important day in a person's life. A TV episode is always about just another day (because the show has to come back next week). This is why Lou Grant came closer to depicting real journalism than most journalism movies--although even Lou Grant showed all the exciting parts and virtually none of the long, boring city council meetings or short stupid drunk-driving arrest reports from the police station.

The relevance of this observation to your question? A good journalism movie does, indeed, depict much of what it is like to be a reporter, on the most exciting day of a reporter's life. Repunching the Boston-area weather report, taking dictation from a stringer at a college football game, rewriting newspaper stories into radio wire format--the staples of wire service life--are difficult to dramatize and not very interesting to watch, so you'll never see them (except perhaps fleetingly) in a movie. Ditto sitting in the rain waiting for a staged event you can put on your television news program, or waiting in vain for news to return to American commercial radio stations.

In 25 years as a journalist, I have averaged about one amazing working day a year and 249 pedestrian ones. In 18 months at the Oregon Journal, I had one plane crash and one venal corporate executive. In six months at AP, I had Nixon resigning and Boston school busing. In 18 months at UPI, I had one presidential visit to Boston. Of course, my worst day as a journalist was better than my best day as a PR man, or a television station engineer or a book author (although my best day as a talk show host was pretty good, and I like my performance on Win Ben Stein's Money). It is a great field and can be very rewarding.

To summarize, a movie can show you journalism at its best and most exciting, with important decisions being made on the spur of the moment and great issues being hashed out of the best days, but will never show you the mind-bending tediousness, the petty office politics, the repetition and the routine that characterize the average days.

I think you can find much wisdom on the subject of [journalism at my quote site](#).

What movie portrays Journalism best in your opinion?

"The Paper" (1994), with Robert Duvall, Glenn Close and Michael Keaton working for The Sun, a fictional New York tabloid modeled on the NY Post. What's not to like about a film that makes the NY Times look like a bunch of pompous, arrogant, pampered... well, in any case, I think it hits the nail on the head.

Also brilliant is "Deadline USA" (1952), with Humphrey Bogart, a fictionalized version of the death of the NY World.

Paul E. Schindler Jr. AP, UPI, Oregon Journal, Computer Systems News, Information Systems News, InformationWeek, PC Week, WINDOWS Magazine.
Contributor to: San Jose Mercury News, NY Daily News.

My Feelings About Journalism Movies

1. Do you have any favorite journalism movies?

Yes. My favorite movie is "The Paper" with Michael Keaton, which I think is the most realistic portrayal of modern journalism, except, of course, for the fantastic parts they had to add for Hollywood (the columnist with the gun, the button that stops the presses). The depiction of the pressures of competition, the scorn for competitors, the drudgery, cajolery and trickery involved in eliciting stories--these things all ring true. And the scene with the Managing Editor and the Publisher in the bathroom was priceless.

Second best is the favorite I share with Bob Greene of the Chicago Tribune, and that is "Deadline USA" (at least it used to be his favorite; he wrote it up years ago in the Sigma Delta Chi magazine). This 1952 film starring Humphrey Bogart, is a classic, and a great depiction of journalism as it was practiced from the 20s through the 60s. Again, more details at the site.

"Citizen Kane" is nice enough, and its an honor to have the late Pauline Kael pick a journalism movie as the best film of all time. That's as may be, but in my opinion it is not the best journalism film of all time.

2. Do you feel that any movies featuring journalists have had an impact on the field of journalism?

Almost without question, "All The President's Men" contributed to a groundswell of newcomers into the field of journalism during the 1970s, with its heroic portrayal of Woodward and Bernstein. It also contributed to a loss of trust between journalists and public officials, and led, in part, I believe, to the current state of "constant scandal" in the Washington press corps.

3. Do you feel that any movies featuring journalists have had an impact on the public's perception of journalists?

I think "All The President's Men" made us heroes, and "Absence of Malice" made us goats. Fortunately, many more people saw the former than the latter. Although I haven't seen it, I understand "The Insider" makes journalists look pretty good as well.

4. Have you been impacted or inspired by any movies that feature journalists?

"Absence of Malice" made me more careful about both facts and implications. "The Paper" made me more careful about not putting the job before the marriage. The Superman TV show and comic book actually contributed mightily to my decision to become a journalist; I loved Superman.

5. Of the movies you have seen, do you feel that any have portrayed journalists accurately, and if so, which ones?

"The Paper", "Absence of Malice", possibly "The Insider," which I haven't seen. "Deadline USA" was good for its day, a period also depicted, somewhat mechanically, by "-30-". To a certain extent, "Ace In The Hole," although its picture of journalism isn't very pretty. Certainly not "I Love Trouble" or "Switching Channels," which are just silly.

6. Do feel that some movies stereotype journalists of various types? If so, what stereotypes have you noticed?

There are good journalists and bad journalists, and most publishers are shown as venal and stupid, although a few are brave and courageous. For every example, there seems to be a counter-example, in every era. Since former print reporters

write more movies than former broadcasters, most print reporters are portrayed well, most broadcast reporters come off as idiots. Obviously, "Broadcast News" and "Up Close And Personal" were extreme exceptions to this general rule.

The Best Journalism Movie Of All Time

[The Paper \(1994\)](#)



Robert Duvall, Glenn Close and Michael Keaton in the editorial meeting at the **New York Sun**, the tabloid featured in **The Paper**.

Wanna start an argument among professional journalists or serious movie buffs? Ask them to name the greatest journalism movie of all times. I don't know if Bob Greene still thinks it is **Deadline USA**, but I am certain that most critics continue to follow Pauline Kael's loudly thumped tub, granting **Citizen Kane** that honor. I respectfully disagree. **Citizen Kane** was brilliant for its time, but that's not what journalism is like any more. My nominee is **The Paper**. It is funny, clever, amusing, entertaining and makes fun of the pomposity of the **NY Times**. What more can you ask from a motion picture? It moves rapidly and offers what is, in my experience, about as accurate a portrayal of modern newspaper life as we are likely to see in a movie. We can all pick nits until the cows come home, and no one, myself included, is going to claim that Ron Howard is Orson Welles' match as a director, or that Michael Keaton is his match as an actor. But they, together with their cast and crew have set a new standard against which future newspaper movies will be measured. I mean, except for that scene

in the press room at the end with the big red switch. OK. That was silly, overdone, stupid and unrealistic. But hey, **Citizen Kane** wasn't perfect either.

In February 2002, I exchanged email on the subject of this movie with financial journalist Larry King, an American now based in London.

Larry began the exchange:

By the way, your latest column mentions that you think **The Paper** is the all-time best journalism movie. I'd agree, although it necessarily omits the bonecrushing boredom of much newspaper work and truly awe-inspiring stupidity and cowardice of a lot of newspaper editors.

From time to time, I've idly wondered who wrote the screenplay -- too idly to look it up. Have you any idea? I assume it was somebody who once worked at the **New York Post**.

My favorite scene comes in that exchange when Spaulding Gray, playing an editor at what's clearly meant to be the **New York Times**, tells Michael Keating he's just blown his chance to cover the world. Keating screams back that he doesn't care, because he doesn't live in the world, he lives in New York City.

According to the Internet Movie Database, your favorite line (and one of mine) goes like this:

"Oh yeah? Well guess fuckin' what? I don't really fuckin' care. You wanna know fuckin' why? Because I don't live in the fuckin' world, I live in New York City! So go fuck yourself."

Writers are David Koepp and Stephen Koepp. **The Paper** is the only thing Stephen has ever written; David has written 15 films, most notably **Toy Soldiers**, **Jurrasic Park 1 and 2**, and the forthcoming **Spiderman**. Stephen must have gotten the feel of **The Post** from hanging around with reporters, or else newspapering in Waukesha is a lot more exciting than I imagined, because here's his bio:

Koepp, 42, a Wisconsin native, received a B.A. degree

(journalism major, German minor) from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire in 1978. After graduation he joined the **Waukesha Freeman**, a daily newspaper in Wisconsin, where he worked as a news reporter and city editor. At the Freeman, he won a statewide wire-service award for investigative reporting.

Koepp joined **TIME** magazine in 1981. He started in letters to the editor, spent the 80s writing business, and is now Deputy Managing Editor.

Larry responded:

I would guess the non-screen-writing Koepp learned all he needed about newspapers from the **Waukesha Freeman**. One of the depressing things about newspapering is how little changes going from a fifth-rate rag in a one-horse town to the New York Times. You get some smarter people in the newsroom, and a lot more of them, at a big-city daily. Generally, management is a bit less miserly about things like travel. So the product improves. But the day-to-day grind of being a reporter or working editor looks and feels much the same, I think.

Come to think of it, you're right about newspapering. While I only worked one daily (the **Oregon Journal**), and you worked several, I have seen enough newsrooms to know that you are speaking the truth. The workload, the physical surroundings, the average IQ--these things can all change. But the basics of the business do not. Well, except for one other thing: in large cities, novel and interesting things happen. In smaller towns, even a city the size of Portland, Oregon (500k), the traditional definition of news leaves you covering the same events over and over, especially if you're a beat reporter (I worked in the business department).

The Paper, 07-2193, \$19.99 from [Movies Unlimited](#)

[Deadline USA \(1952\)](#)

Bob Greene, a columnist for the **Chicago Tribune** wrote an article years ago in **The Quill**, the magazine of the Society of Professional Journalists, in which he selected this film as the best journalism movie of all times. Certainly one of the most memorable scenes in any journalism film (on a par with "He stole my watch" at the end of **The Front Page**) is the final scene of this film.



Humphrey Bogart
Managing Editor



Bogart and ex-wife
Nora (Kim Hunter)



Poster from the film

For a long time, I had that scene wrong. I was corrected on July 3, 1997 by Stephen Stuart of the **New Orleans CityBusiness** newspaper. He sent me back to the videotape, from which I transcribed the scene carefully.

The scene has Bogart [managing editor Ed

Hutcheson] on the phone in the pressroom talking to mobster Tomas Rienzi.

RIENZI: Hutcheson?

HUTCHESON: Hello, Baby.

RIENZI: (pause) How'm I feeling? I hear Mrs. Schmidt came in to see you.

HUTCHESON: (pause) That's right. That's right. There's some loose cash here belongs to you. \$200,000 worth. There's something else too.

RIENZI: What diary? Who's gonna believe what a little tramp writes to herself? Wait a minute. Don't hang up. Here's some advice for you friend. Don't press your luck. Lay off me. Don't print that story.

HUTCHESON: What's that supposed to be, an order?

RIENZI: If not tonight, then tomorrow. [Rienzi's attorney grabs his arm; Rienzi shakes him off] Maybe next week, maybe next year. But sooner or later you'll catch it. Listen to me. Print that story and you're a dead man.

HUTCHESON: It's not just me anymore. You'd have to stop every newspaper in the country and you're not big enough for that

job. People like you have tried it before. With bullets, prison, censorship. But as long as even one newspaper will print the truth, you're finished.

RIENZI: Don't give me that fancy double-talk. Yes or no.

[Pressroom clock hits 10:30 PM. Press foreman looks at Bogart/Hutcheson, who nods. The foreman pushes the button that rings the bell and brings the press to full speed. The noise in the press room increases]

RIENZI: Yes or no?

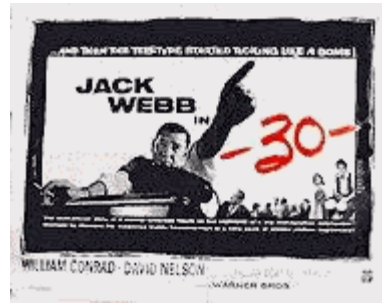
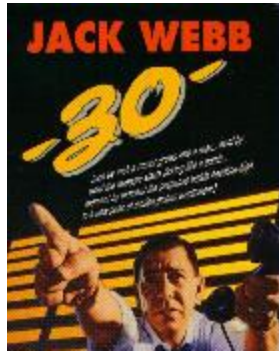
HUTCHESON: [holds phone out to presses]

RIENZI: Hey Hutcheson? That noise? What's that racket?

HUTCHESON: That's the press, baby, the press, and there's nothing you can do about it. Nothing. [hangs up]

-30- (1959) [Montage of press rolling, close-up of newspaper with large picture of Rienzi and headline "Tomas Rienzi accused of Sally's Murder." Outside shot of The Day building, as the light is turned out behind the big logo for the last time. Music in the background switches to Battle Hymn of the Republic]

(This movie is also known as **Deadline Midnight**).



From the Movies Unlimited Catalog: "Gritty newspaper drama. Stars Jack Webb as the managing editor of a big city daily (pretty clearly Los Angeles) who experiences personal and professional obstacles during the course of a day. While grappling with his wife about adopting a child, Webb covers stories about a missing girl and disappearing pilots. Webb also directs. For another take, check [this review](#).

Absent from every major movie reference work this film (available from [Movies Unlimited](#), 19-2262 \$19.99) can be seen periodically on late night TV. It stars Jack Webb, at the height of his success in the television series *Dragnet*, "stretching" in a new dramatic direction. His character might as well be called Joe Friday; the performance is vintage Jack Webb. William Conrad is terrific--gruff and funny--as the city editor, and David Nelson (son of *Ozzie and Harriet*) does a turn as dazed, confused and abused copy boy. The staff cartoonist is played by Richard Deacon, who went on a few years later to significant fame as the supervisor of the writers (foil to Morry Amsterdam and son-in-law of the seldom-seen Alan Brady) on the Dick Van Dyke show.

In my opinion, this film has one of the best speeches ever delivered in a journalism film. I am reprinting the speech here because:

- 1) This is a review of the film
- 2) This speech is a very small percentage of the entire content
- 3) I am not reproducing this speech for commercial gain

Final Shooting Script, -30-, a Mark VII Production for Warner Bros., June 12, 1959. Scene added August 5, 1959. Written by William Bowers.

Copy Aide Ron Danton (John Nolan) and City Editor Jim Bathgate (William Conrad) discuss newspapers in front of Collins (David Nelson) who has just quit. It is raining.

Ron: referring to a newspaper) Have you ever seen one of these things on a newsstand in a rainstorm like this? They look like a lot of old bags whose faces have fallen.

Jim: That's right, Aristotle--that's because nobody's come up with a waterproof paper yet. But even if they **did**, we wouldn't use it and the *Examiner* wouldn't use it and neither would any other paper in the country.

Because we have to print on the cheapest paper they can make. Otherwise, we couldn't sell for a dime. You know what people use these for? They roll them up and swat their puppies for wetting on the rug--

--they spread them on the floor when they're painting the walls--

-- they wrap fish in them--

-- shred them up and pack their two-bit china in them when they move--

--or else they pile up in the garage until an inspector declares them a fire hazard!

But this also happens to be a couple of more things! It's got print on it that tells stories that hundreds of good men all over the world have broken their backs to get. It gives a lot of information to a lot of people who wouldn't have known about it if we hadn't taken the trouble to tell them. It's the sum total of the work of a lot of guys who don't quit. It's a newspaper, that's all. Well, you're right for once, stupid.

And it only costs 10 cents, that's all. But if you only read the comic section or the want ads--it's still the best buy for your money in the world. I'm sorry to see you go Collins--here--you'll probably want something to read on your way home.

The Front Page ([1931](#), [1974](#))

Also

[His Girl Friday \(1940\)](#)

And

[Switching Channels \(1988\)](#)

With the exception of **Switching Channels**, a lame remake which featured Burt Reynolds, Kathleen Turner and Christopher Reeve that set the story in a television station, each of these versions of the classic Hecht and Macarthur play from 1928 has its aficionados.



Pat O'Brien and Adolphe Menjou in the 1st movie version of **The Front Page**. Still courtesy of the **Detroit Free Press** web site.

The first movie version, a black and white classic made just three years after the play premiered featured Adolph Menjou as Walter Burns, the fierce managing editor, and Pat O'Brien as the put upon Hildy Johnson.



Ralph Bellamy, Cary Grant and Rosalind Russell in **His Girl Friday**, the third remake of **The Front Page**.

The clever gender switched remake **His Girl Friday** is probably the most popular of the films. Not only were Cary Grant and Rosalind Russell an inspired pair of comedic actors (as opposed to

Menjou and O'Brien, who could handle comedy but were better known for and better suited for drama), but there were directed to deliver their dialog at such a frenetic pace that the movie is in the Guinness Book of World Records for most words spoken per minute of screen time!



Jack Lemmon and Walter Mathau in the same situation as Menjou and O'Brien. Interestingly, both directors composed an almost identical shot, including the placement: reporter, policeman, managing editor. Still courtesy of the **Detroit Free Press** web site.

In the third remake Walter Mathau and Jack Lemmon who tackled the material under the direction of veteran Bill Wilder did an acceptable job; their version featured Carol Burnett in a role (the girlfriend of the escaped convict) that previous versions basically threw away.



Burt Reynolds and Kathleen Turner from the lamest of the **Front Page** Remakes, **Switching Channels**. Still courtesy of the **Detroit Free Press** web site.

The fourth time was not the charm. Reynolds and Turner in **Switching Channels** were just wrong for the material, and the work is so deeply rooted in newspaper lore that the conversion to TV seemed forced, and the gender switch (Turner played Hildy) was derivative. Christopher Reeve was excellent as the boyfriend, however.

All the versions (except **Switching Channels**) end with one of the play's best lines, as Burns gives Johnson his watch, then telegraphs the police to have him/her arrested for stealing the watch. My favorite new line in **His Girl Friday** comes when Cary Grant sends his goon, Diamond Louie, after Hildy's finace'. "He looks just like Ralph Bellamy," Grant says, which was pretty rich, as Ralph Bellamy was the actor playing the fiance'.

Here's something you'll never learn anywhere else: Diamond Louie was named after Lou Diamond (but not modelled after him), a Chicago newspaperman during Hecht and MacArthur's time as reporters there. Lou Diamond was the father of NYU (and formerly MIT) journalism professor, the late Edwin Diamond.

[Absence of Malice \(1981\)](#)



I can't summarize This film better than the excellent [Detroit Free Press Journalism Movie Page](#):

This is a sentimental Free Press favorite, written by former Freep executive editor Kurt Luedtke. Forever fretful Miami reporter Sally Field ties an innocent Paul Newman to the disappearance and possible murder of a union leader. A suspenseful examination of newspaper ethics. 1982, 116 minutes.

The tagline, as noted at the Internet Movie Database, is an absolute classic:

Suppose you picked up this morning's newspaper and your life was a front page headline... And everything they said was accurate... But none of it was true

The summary at IMDB is also great:

Paul Newman plays the son of a long dead Mafia boss who is a simple liquor warehouse owner. Frustrated in his attempt to solve a murder of a union head, a prosecutor leaks a false story that Newman is a target of the investigation, hoping that he will tell them something for protection. As his life begins to unravel, others are hurt by the story. Sally Field, the reporter, is in the clear under the Absence of Malice rule in slander and libel cases. Knowing nothing to trade to the prosecutors, Newman must regain control of his life on different ground.

There are three things that struck me about this film:

- the utter implausibility of Wilford Brimley's *Deus Ex Machina* appearance at the end of the film,
- the slight implausibility of Paul Newman's character being able to dig himself out of a hole so well (it was true in the 19th century, it is true in the 21st century: never argue with someone who buys ink by the barrel), and
- the total lack of implausibility of the Sally Fields character desperately trying to rationalize her way out of an ethical dilemma. Of all the behavior I saw in this film, hers rang the most true. It is a variation of that old journalistic saw, "Don't let the facts get in the way of a good story." Sad, but true.

[Blessed Event \(1932\)](#)



This is a *roman a clef* about Walter Winchell (the subject of several biographies you can look up over in my [books database](#)).

[The Big Clock \(1948\)](#)



Anyone familiar with Time/Life will recognize elements in this film that parody that organization, although the characterization of the publisher, Earl Janoth, is of course way over-drawn as a picture of Henry Luce. Kenneth Fearing, the author of the book of the same name upon which the movie was based was a former Time Inc. Employee



[I Love Trouble \(1994\)](#)



Nick Nolte and Julia Roberts in **I Love Trouble**. Still courtesy of the **Detroit Free Press** web site.

Nick Nolte and Julia Roberts. Sex. Adventure. A big, fat, successful newspaper and a skinny scrappy one (the **Chicago Tribune** and the **Chicago Sun Times** perhaps?). How could this film go wrong? Not very many people bothered to find out, as it died at the box office. A lot of journalists hated this film. It is silly and unrealistic most of the time (no journalist I know, have met or have heard of has fallen through a skylight... while sober... while on duty...), but has some nice touches. It has the look and feel of real journalism now and then, and accurately portrays competitive journalist psychology most of the time. Mitchell Leisen, the

director, had to throw in the murder and the chase scenes in an effort to make the film commercial. It didn't work, as it turns out, but this film is an example of Hollywood trying its best, and I think it deserves an A for effort. Any serious student of journalism movies ought to have a look. If only they hadn't sent Julia out on assignment in a train yard in high heels and a tight skirt. I know a lot of female journalists, and none of them dress like that when they're on duty... or if they do, they carry a change of shoes.

[Up Close and Personal \(1996\)](#)



It started out as a Jessica Savitch Biopic, ended up as a vehicle for Redford and Pfeiffer.



Well, I can say for sure this is a journalism movie. Almost the entire running time is taken up with an inside look at the television news business. But it is really more a star vehicle for Michelle Pfeiffer and Robert Redford, whose love affair provides the non-journalistic content. The movie is loosely based on messed-up life of NBC newscaster Jessica Savitch. Screenwriters John Gregory Dunne and Joan Didion wrote [Monster, Living Off The Big Screen](#) about their experiences writing the movie. As Dunne said to Esquire (as quoted in an online review), "Disney wasn't going to make a movie about a lesbian who drank and took drugs," which is why they movie took so long and so many rewrites to become what it became--a star-studded love story. Sally Atwater, who later becomes Tally Atwater, is fresh, innocent Michelle Pfeiffer. Warren Justice, deposed network correspondent looking for another shot at the big time, is Robert Redford. Sparks were supposed to ensue. They didn't. Still, it is an enjoyable movie, slightly better than the two- and three-star reviews it got in most places. And as a journalism movie, it is first rate--lots of inside looks at how TV news REALLY works.

[Broadcast News \(1987\)](#)



Holly Hunter and William Hurt pow-wow in a scene from the first-rate TV news drama/comedy/parody **Broadcast News**.

It is possible that William Hurt and Holly Hunter gave their best-ever performances in this excellent, cynical look at the inner workings of TV news, written and directed by James L. Brooks. Bismarck said people who like government and wieners should never watch laws or sausage being made. The same can be said for TV news. This film is often lumped in, unfairly, with Paddy Chayefsky's brilliant fantasy **Network**, but that was fantasy and this is based, at least partly, on reality.

My favorite speech is delivered by Aaron Altman (the brilliant and frequently under-rated Albert Brooks), who is telling Jane Craig (Holly Hunter) that the empty-headed correspondent Tom (William Hurt) is the devil:

Aaron: I know you care about him. I've never seen you like this with anybody, so don't get me wrong when I tell you that Tom, while being a very nice guy, is the devil.

Jane: This is friendly? You're crazy, you know it?
[walks away]

Aaron: What do you think the Devil's going to look like?

Jane: Oh, God.

Aaron: Come on. No one's going to be taken in by a guy with a long, red, pointy tail. Come on, what's he gonna sound like [animal growl]. No! I'm semi-serious here.

Jane: You're serious...

Aaron: No, he'll be attractive, he'll be nice and

helpful. He'll get a job where we'll influence a great and god-fearing nation. He'll never do an evil thing. He'll never deliberately hurt a living thing. He'll just, bit by little bit, lower our standards where they're important. Just a tiny little bit. Just coax along flash over substance. Just a tiny little bit. He'll talk about all of us really being salesmen [Jane starts to leave]. And he'll get all the great women.

Jane: [Halts at door and yells back, then walks back as she talks] Hey, Aaron, I think you're the devil.

Aaron: You know I'm not.

Jane: How?

Aaron: Because we have the kind of friendship that if I was, you'd be the only person I'd tell...Give me this. He personifies everything that you've been fighting against and I'm in love with you. How do you like that. I buried the lede.

[All The President's Men](#) (1976)



Dustin Hoffman (Carl Bernstein) and Robert Redford (Bob Woodward) played the world's most famous journalists in the gripping journalism drama **All The President's Men.**

This film was **The Paper** of its era, well-written and meticulously researched and loving in its depiction of its journalist heroes, due, it seems certain, to the fact that Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward wrote the film. Veteran Alan J .Pakula then realized their vision with care and aplomb.

For those too young to recall, Woodward and Bernstein were a pair of **Washington Post** reporters who covered Watergate when it appeared to be just what President Richard Nixon said it was, "a second-rate burglary." Their tenacity, combined with some effective prodding by Judge John Sirica

(revisionists will tell you his role is overplayed--don't you believe them) broke the case open and brought down a president.

This movie is one of the few journalism films in history that had a perceptible effect, both on the field of journalism and the public perception of journalists. In combination with the book of the same name, it made heroes of journalists--and goats and liars of most public figures depicted, and so by implication, most public figures. It affected the field of journalism in two ways. First, it brought an entire generation of fresh, eager recruits into the field. Alas, it also taught them that there was scandal everywhere. As a result, journalists have uncovered 13 of the last 10 scandals in Washington. That is to say, they see scandal everywhere, even in innocent mistakes. Napoleon said, "Never ascribe to malice that which is adequately explained by incompetence." I agree. We have criminalized trivial error in government, and thrown the baby out with the bath water. Scoundrels have, indeed, been driven from the public weal. So have good, honest public servants whose only mistakes were small and/or personal.

As for the film itself, it was masterpiece of recreation. Dustin Hoffman and Robert Redford spent time at **The Post** and with Woodward and Bernstein, and it shows in their lifelike portrayals, which capture the nuance of journalism. Amazingly, for a Hollywood film, it manages to capture some of the slogging and monotony, the combination of luck and persistence often required for good journalism. The **Post** newsroom in the film was a precise copy of the original--so precise that it included "desk litter" imported from Washington (including, reporters say, press releases for the film).

Reporters have never looked better, smarter, more noble--or handsomer (well, at least in the case of Redford). Whether **All The President's Men** has been a net positive for American journalism remains to be seen.

[The Insider \(1999\)](#)



Al Pacino (Lowell Bergman) and Russell Crowe (Jeffrey Wigand) are the 60 Minutes producer and the whistleblower in **The Insider**.

This is a first-class piece of work, although it is **way** too long, at 158 minutes. It is one of those "ripped from the headlines" stories, based on a magazine article by Marie Brenner (a neophyte who co-wrote the screenplay with veteran scribe Eric Roth) entitled "The Man Who Knew Too Much." It is the story of fired Brown and Williamson research chief Jeffery Wigand, and his relationship with Lowell Bergman, a producer for the CBS Television newsmagazine, "60 Minutes." The story has many threads, one of which is the CBS corporate decision to force the news division not to air its interview with Wigand. As Joe Saltzman of USC puts it, "watch out for those terribly mean and vicious publishers. They men who owned the media were always out to get you." True in the 1930s, true in the *fin-de-siècle*.

One of the first things I always wonder about a film is "how true is it." Most of the major events in the film are true. There was a Jeffrey Wigand, he did work for Brown and Williamson, he was fired. He was interviewed, the interview was suppressed, Brown and Williamson did smear him with a 500-page dossier the **Wall Street Journal** debunked. Bergman did leak the story to the **New York Times**. Bergman quit 60 Minutes and now teaches journalism at Cal. The devil is in the details of course, and Mike Wallace was spitting mad about this film, which, frankly, isn't a very flattering portrayal of the journalistic lion. Bergman comes off much better, but since he was a consultant on the film, is that any surprise? It tends to support Saltzman's observation that journalists as portrayed sympathetically when it's a journalist writing the script, less sympathetically when its a pure screenwriter putting the words in the actors' mouths.

There are so many wonderful things about this film it is hard to know where to start. Of course, like all journalism films, it concentrates on the most exciting, important days in a journalist's life, because tedium isn't very entertaining. You could be a journalist for 50 years and never be driven through the streets of Beirut with a sack over your head, as Bergman is in the opening scene.

I have never been a producer on a television magazine show, but I've read

plenty about the process, and this is an illuminating and eye opening portrayal of the way that particular kind of journalistic sausage gets stuffed in its case. In particular, if you didn't already know it, you learn that producers do most of the work on a story so that the talent can parachute in and ask the questions on camera. Each of the correspondents works with four producers for one week a month; the producers each have three weeks to get ready for their "on" week. Knowledge of this system makes Pacino/Bergman's speech to Wallace about "you've never landed and found a source has changed his mind" particularly poignant.

One aspect of this film is unique in my experience: you get a snootful of what it's like to be the subject/source of a major investigative story. This is an extreme case, of course, but it raises the ethical question of whether a journalist must consider the consequences of a story for the people who supply the raw facts.

In fact, this movie raises a number of ethical questions, including, but not limited to, issues surrounding keeping your word to a source, protecting a source, when corporate can overrule the news division, when you quit on principle and when you continue to work from the inside for change. Not to mention the dilemma faced by Wigand (and many other sources) of violating a confidentiality agreement when you know you are being asked to keep secret information the public needs to know.

This entry is not proportional to the importance of this film among journalism films, or even where it stands on my list of great movies in this genre--its location near the bottom of the file says more about that. But Michael Mann is a great director, this was a major Hollywood film, and it treated broadcast journalism accurately, lovingly, dramatically and with a great deal of respect. Plus, I may start analyzing journalism movies for a living, so I'd better find a few more intelligent things to say about them.



<>

[The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture \(IJPC\), continued](#)

As part of its commitment, IJPC will undertake the following:

*Publication of books, periodicals, monographs, and articles. First publication: *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film* by Joe Saltzman. Future publications will include specific categories summarizing the images of the journalist: anonymous reporters; columnists and critics; cub reporters; editors; flawed male journalists; investigative reporters; memorable newsroom families; photojournalists and newsreel shooters; publishers and media owners; real-life journalists; sob sisters; sports journalists; and war and foreign correspondents. Each will be the subject of a separate publication including a book-length essay and CD-ROM supplement.

*Maintain, enlarge, and archive IJPC's database of nearly 20,000 items of the journalist in films, television, radio, commercials, cartoons, and fiction.

*Maintain, enlarge, and archive IJPC's collection of 1,200 videotapes, audiotapes, and MP3 files (more than 5,000 hours of radio programs) and various scripts, books, novels, short stories, research materials, articles, and other artifacts.

*Surveys documenting the public perception of journalists and the journalists' perception of journalists in both fiction and nonfiction media.

*Creation of symposia, exhibits, conferences, classes, and video-audio festivals documenting the image of the journalist in popular culture. Two examples: curating an exhibit of the image of the journalist in film and television for the Newseum in Washington, DC, in 2002, and the creation of a USC Annenberg School of Journalism class featuring twenty-eight documentaries showing the image of the journalist in film and television in the twentieth century.

*Working with researchers and scholars in the field. Loren Ghiglione, dean, the Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University, and Richard Ness, author of *From Headline Hunter to Superman: A Journalism Filmography*, are two of the top researchers in the field who have agreed to work on the IJPC project.

*Creation of a Web site sharing research materials with the public and academic community.

*Creation of a journal featuring articles from experts in the field.

Movies Unlimited

800-466-8437, fax: 215-725-3683. Amex, Visa and MC accepted.
Email is movies@moviesunlimited.com.

Many of the movies listed here are available from Movies Unlimited, even if there isn't a specific reference to their price and order number.

Movies I Still Want/Am Willing To Buy

All Over Town 1949
Carter Case (The) 1942
Confirm Or Deny 1941
Day The Earth Caught Fire (The) 1963
Front Page Story 1953

Headline Hunters 1955
I Live in Danger 1942
Inside Story 1939
It Happens Every Thursday 1953
Journalist (The) 1979
News Hounds 1947
News Is Made At Night 1939
Newsboy's Home 1939
Newsfront 1978
Night Editor 1946
Not For Publication 1984
Platinum Blonde 1931
Scandal Sheet 1931
Shakedown 1950
Street of Missing Men 1939
That Wonderful Urge 1948
Traps 1994

Journalism on TV

According to the book, "The Complete Directory To Prime Time Network and Cable TV Shows, 1946-Present, Twentieth Anniversary Edition" by Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh, © 1999 by Ballantine Books, the following television shows about journalists have appeared in Prime Time. Let me note, by the way, that this otherwise excellent tome does NOT include a topical index, so I had to scan all 1,000 pages of listings to find the "newspaper dramas." I left a few journalist comedies (eg: The Mary Tyler Moore Show) off the list.

I would be interested in buying videotape copies of any of these.

Barney Blake, Police Reporter, NBC, 1948
Big Town, CBS, DuMont, NBC, 1950-1956
Byline , ABC, 1951
Capital News, ABC, April 1990 [I'd REALLY like any copy of this one]
Crime Photographer, CBS, 1951-1952
The Front Page, CBS, 1949-1950
Front Page Detective, DuMont, 1952
I Cover Times Square, ABC, 1950-1951
[Live Shot](#), UPN, 1995
Lou Grant, CBS, 1977-1982

The Name of the Game, NBC, 1968-1971
[Murphy Brown](#), CBS, 1988-98
[New York News](#), CBS, 1995
[NewsRoom](#), CBC, 1996-1997[episodes are available on videotape]
 Not For Publication, Dumont, 1951
 The Reporter, CBS, 1964 [I believe this was shot in the New York Mirror newsroom, shortly after that paper folded]
[Sports Night](#), ABC, 1999
 Studio 5B, ABC, 1989
[Target: The Corrupters](#), ABC, 1971
 Wire Service [aka Deadline for Action], ABC, 1956-1959 [the adventures of three reporters for the Trans-Globe Wire Service]

To obtain a weekly reminder about my personal column or to offer feedback, advice, praise, or criticism write to me: paul@schindler.org

[Paul Schindler Home Page](#) | [PS...ACOT archives](#) | [Journalism Movies Paying For This Column](#)

Content Revisions:

3/17/02 Posted new movie tables 3/5/02 [Dropped WIOU (I have it), Added IJPC and "The Insider"]
 2/19/02 [Added e-mail exchange with Larry King to description of "The Paper"]
 2/14/02 [Added "My Feelings About Journalism Movies", new link to Journalists in Movies]
 2/12/02 [Added "All The President's Men and Table of Contents]
 12/02/01 [Added "Absence of Malice" and IMDB references for all films]
 11/14/01 [Added "Musing Philosophical" and "Getting Started" sections]
 04/28/01 [Totally revised format, added pictures to -30- and Deadline USA. Moved The Paper to the top]
 04/25/01 [Revised Want List, changed Byte to TechWeb]
 03/17/01 [Added Want List]
 05/01/99 [Changed CMPNet reference to Byte.com]
 08/31/98 [Modified Text, eliminating outdated material]
 11/30/97 [Added Broadcast News]

11/26/97 [added Up Close and Personal]

11/22/97 [note about minor dispute, stills, some rewrite]

10/19/97 [note death of Finnish movie listing page, add Deadline USA scene]

07/05/97 [Stephen Stuart corrections, remove Baker page because of inactivity]

02/28/96 [add new link to Baker movie page]

07/26/99 [added link to Paul Schindler essay on Women in Journalism]

Format Revised:

11/15/96 [add counter]

4/15/96 [New artwork at the top, dropped font changes]

2/1/96 [Added tables]