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The Hollywood Version: Movie Portrayals of the Press

By Thomas H. Zynda



SCENE FROM FILM *NETWORK* shows television studio monitors with faces of network anchorpersons: John Chancellor, NBC, upper left; Howard K. Smith,

ABC, upper right; Walter Cronkite, CBS, lower left; and late actor Peter Finch portraying Howard Beale of the mythical fourth network.

The news media themselves seldom present the public with an image of the press—a concrete, detailed and vivid picture of journalists at their work. The main source of such a portrait is films; indeed, Hollywood has a virtual monopoly on the public's image of the press. In the 50 years since the advent of sound, the movies have, with surprising frequency, chosen the press as their subject; few other institutions have received such consistent attention from filmmakers. Equally surprising is the portrait of the press which these films construct, for it is considerably more complex than the mythic image of the Fourth Estate.¹

Although the individual films differ greatly, they generally portray four aspects of the press: the character of the reporter, the nature of the press organization, the social role of the press and the character of the society in which the press functions. The films show how the press is structured and commanded, how it relates to the larger society that the audience experiences, what journalists are like, how they interact, and how they achieve success in the press. The portrayal is usually not very favorable; despite an occasional *All the President's Men*, the films are more like *Network* in their critical and even cynical view of journalism. The movies often depict the press as the most ruthless of businesses, aimed solely at profit and taking that profit by exploiting innocent people. The audience of the press is likewise shown demanding sensationalism as the price of its patronage. Hollywood's journalists are often intent less on truth than on advancing their own careers by writing whatever the editors or owners want. In the movies, successful journalists are often less than admirable characters.

This criticism is fairly constant over the history of these films, but the details and emphasis of its presentation vary. Most broadly, the middle 1950s are a watershed; films made before and since that time create two distinctly different images of the press. Changes on a smaller scale group the films by decade. The 1930s films emphasize the unconventional nature of journalists and life in the press; this focus widens in the 1940s to an image of the press as a unique instrument of power. Films in the 1950s portray the press as an established business, and with the early 1960s they begin examining the nature of truth as a media problem. The 1970s films renew the examination of the press as an organization. Along with these changes, the movie reporter evolves from a simple newsmonger into a serious and careful journalist.

Hollywood's portrayal of the press, in fact, begins with its molding of the reporter character in the 1931 hit *The Front Page*. Based on the stage play by two former reporters, Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, it is the prototypical newspaper film and worth summarizing closely.² The leading character, Hildy Johnson, is a reporter who has decided to quit journalism to become married and respectable. His managing editor, Walter Burns, wants to keep Hildy because of his talent for writing sensational news. On the night of his elopement, Hildy goes to bid farewell to his old reporter friends. They are gathered in the press room of a

prison to cover the execution of a harmless anarchist who was sentenced to die because of their sensationalistic coverage of the trial. Burns encounters Hildy and manipulates him into covering the execution. The prisoner's girl friend, a prostitute, tries to stop the execution by attempting suicide in the prison. The prisoner escapes and Hildy and Burns hide him in order to get an exclusive story. The comic twist in the plot is that Hildy falls in love with reporting again and forgets about his fiancée.

With its characters displaying various forms of corruption or weakness, *The Front Page* portrays big-city journalism as a form of low life. As a picture of the press and the city it seems to have a lasting appeal for the public; following the success of the play and the 1931 film, it was remade in 1940 as *His Girl Friday* with Hildy recast as a woman reporter and again in 1974 with the original story.

Blessed Event (1932), another comedy, gives respectability and glamor to the seedy reporters of *The Front Page* by portraying the press as an avenue to success. In this story, a clerk's talent for gossip earns him his own column, a radio program, a salary of \$50,000 and marriage to his sweetheart. In his climb to success, however, he victimizes a woman for the sake of a story; such incidents of the reporter advancing his own life by ruining others' becomes a standard element of the portrayal.

Films like these established, in the 1930s, the stereotype of the journalist as the street-wise, hard-driving, utterly unscrupulous character who will do anything for a story. He (or she) has reporting "in his blood" and cannot be other than he is. Oblivious to the social implications of his work, this reporter adeptly fabricates news. He understands news in terms of its emotional effect, and hence is interested in scoops and scandals rather than information. He looks upon both the public and his fellow journalists with contempt; the public because it craves what he writes, his fellows because they are his competitors. Yet he feels fulfilled by reporting; it makes him feel powerful over the public and superior to his colleagues.

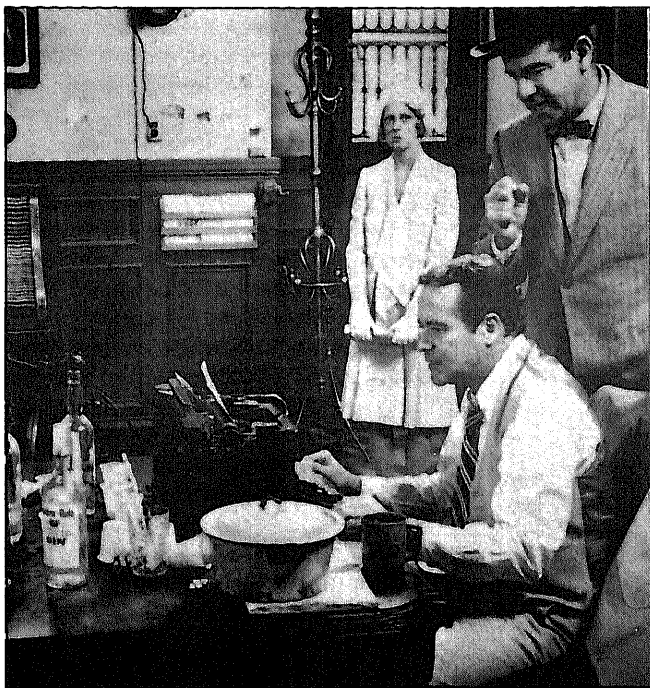
Such a figure contains too-conspicuous seeds of criticism to be sustained for very long as comic. In fact, this comic stereotype of the reporter largely disappears after the 30s. Some revision of the stereotype appears as early as 1934. *It Happened One Night* transforms the comic reporter into a romantic individualist who, fired and penniless, nevertheless marries the daughter of an old and wealthy family. In later comedies the reporter retains the mannerisms—the snap-brim hat, the cigarette in his mouth, the wisecracks—of the stereotype. But he is unambiguously a serious journalist and a solid middle class citizen. In *Woman of the Year* (1942), for example, the reporter describes himself as "an ordinary person" who likes writing about sports for the "ordinary people" who like baseball and read the paper. In thus identifying himself with his audience rather than against it, the reporter becomes a serious, matter-of-fact figure, neither comic nor critical.

While the comic stereotype flourished, another group of 1930s films developed a portrayal of the press in the wider

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IN *BLESSED EVENT* (1932) actor Lee Tracy, above, portrayed reporter who found the press an avenue to success. In the first version of *The Front Page* (1931), right, big-city journalism is portrayed in the fast-paced comedy as a form of low life. Actors from left are Pat O'Brien, George E. Stone and May Clarke. *The Front Page* remake (1974) below, had Jack Lemmon as the reporter Hildy Johnson and Walter Matthau, standing, as managing editor Walter Burns.



perspective of social realism. These films established a critical analysis of journalism that remains the standard Hollywood approach even today. The journalists of this portrayal are near-copies of the comic stereotype, but the films' analysis of the motives and consequences of their work produces a critical, even condemnatory portrait.

An example is *Five Star Final* (1931), released just a few months after *The Front Page*. In what became a standard plot for these films, *Five Star Final* begins with the takeover of a newspaper by a new owner who demands increased circulation. To save his job, the editor resurrects an old scandal about a woman. Circulation expands and the new owner is satisfied, but the woman and her husband are driven to suicide. When he realizes what he has done, the editor explodes into a bitter denunciation of the press and quits journalism.

Five Star Final traces the degradation of journalism to a

public that craves sensationalism and to a news organization that demands sales. In presenting reporters as seedy and vice-prone, the film argues that individuals whose character defects would not be tolerated anywhere else in society will find a home in the press. There are few exceptions to this line of criticism in the 30s. *A Woman Rebels* (1936) tells the story of a woman who converts a tame ladies' magazine into an effective voice for feminist social reform, but the 19th Century British setting of the film removes it from contemporary relevance.

The critical analysis developed further in the 1940s, in such films as *Meet John Doe* (1941) and *Citizen Kane* (1941). *Meet John Doe* employs the by now familiar opening of an outlandishly wealthy man buying a newspaper. His aim is to manipulate the public into electing him dictator of the United States, a scheme for which he has the backing of business, financial and labor leaders. Though his plan falls apart when he is exposed, the movie shows the press neither as publicly beneficial nor as capable of reform. The plot of *Citizen Kane* is quite similar. Kane's motive in his exposes of corruption lies not in public spirit but in his gigantic ego—he wants the public's love and, eventually, their votes to make him governor.³ The movie presents successful journalists as lacking basic integrity. When Kane hires away the staff of a

competing paper, it is clear that these talented men will write whatever any employer wants, so long as the price is right.

By the early 1940s then, comedy and social realism together established a fundamental critical image of the press. The comedy films implicitly criticize the press as the arena of essentially sociopathic characters. The explicit criticism of the social realist portrayal is more complex. In it, the press is a tool of the powerful, used by them to manipulate public opinion and increase their wealth and control. Interlocked with other centers of power in society, its informational potential is diverted to the purposes of amusing and manipulating the gullible public. As an organization, the press offers excitement and opportunity, but the reporter can succeed only by sensationalizing or inventing news. Reporters in the comic films sometimes have moments of guilt over their scandalmongering, as in *Blessed Event*, but usually they are irresponsible and care little about the public. In the critical films the reporters are often serious, ethically aware journalists, but they discard their ideals in order to advance their careers or simply to keep their jobs. The serious films thus attribute some blame to press managers or owners.

Elements of this criticism appear even in such otherwise positive films as *The Story of G.I. Joe* (1945), which honors World War II correspondent Ernie Pyle. Quiet, unambitious and interested in people, Pyle sends his paper character sketches of individual soldiers to win the country's sympathy for the men. Such character is shown to be rare among journalists, however; when Pyle wins the Pulitzer Prize, his fellow correspondents are bitter in their envy.

Criticism of the press is generalized to apply to the entire society in *The Big Carnival* (1951; also released as *Ace in the Hole*) which portrays the press as a microcosm of an exploitative economic system. Much like the films of the thirties, this portrayal shows desperate reporters, the New York editors in fear of whom they live, and the sensation-hungry public to have no regard for human life.

The films up to the early 50s, including the comic with the serious, form a distinct group in their image of the press. They portray the news organization as a wild affair in which the newspaper desperately competes in daily circulation wars. Opportunism prevails and truth is the last priority of both the reporter and the organization. Under these conditions, the organization maintains a fluid structure. It welcomes the ambitious and talented, but the talent that brings success is a knack for appealing to the public's lowest or silliest instincts.

Reporters in this portrayal are clever individualists, constantly generating ideas to increase circulation and, along with it, their own rewards. Cynical, often personally obnoxious, they are not concerned with professional ethics, the public or truth. Egocentric, sometimes megalomaniac, they often see the press as a means to personal success, and view the public as gullible. Equally conspicuous is the fact that this characterization applies as well to the women journalists in these films.⁴

In this image, the society is even more disorganized than the newsroom. It is this chaotic society that the capable

reporter exploits for sensational stories which it, in turn, eagerly buys. These films thus juxtapose a picture of the impressive communications power of the press with one of its degradation, its devotion to titillating rather than informing the public.

A second image of the press begins developing in the middle 1950s. While still usually critical, this image embodies new details and different themes in depicting post-televison journalism. *While the City Sleeps* (1956) illustrates the features of this new portrayal. The film represents the press as a multi-media organization owning a wire service and radio and television stations in addition to its newspaper. In the plot, the heads of these media compete for an executive position to be awarded to the one who can find a sex murderer for the police. Though improbable, this story permits portraying the different media operating as a coordinated communications system that reaches everyone in the city, even someone as alienated as the murderer.

Using information which a friend in the police department gives to him exclusively, the reporter-hero lures the murderer into a trap by telecasting an open message to him. A press organization with such contacts is no longer the maverick of the 1930s films; it is part of the established order of society. In this portrayal society is a mosaic of organizations which coordinate their actions by informal, interpersonal contacts beyond the public view. The press is shown to complement other agencies, such as the police, in maintaining the social order.

In this view individuals are legitimized by their organizational membership. Anyone lacking such an affiliation is a social outcast, even, in the case of *While the City Sleeps*, a criminal. The role of the press is that of locating and reporting on such outcasts.⁵ In its depiction of media technology, this film recalls *Blessed Event* which, a quarter century earlier, featured a display of radio and the dictaphone employed to harass a gangster. The men of the 50s film, however, are not the individualistic reporters of the 30s. As individuals, they are capable journalists but frightened and impotent personalities, manipulated by the organization and by women who are ambitious and calculating. Rather than creating anything journalistically new, they merely compete for a defined job, and they compete chiefly by sabotaging each other. In this way *While the City Sleeps* portrays journalism as fully organized, routinized and closed to innovation.

The lot of these journalists is not a happy one. When they are not working or plotting against each other, they are drinking themselves into a stupor in a bar conveniently located in the organization's skyscraper. They are motivated in their efforts to find the murderer not by concern for the public, but by the organization's exploitation of their greed and fear. Although he does not entirely share these traits, the hero of *While the City Sleeps* is colorless, completely lacking in ambition and content with his low-key role in the organization. He is, however, genuinely concerned with catching the murderer for the public good. He thus fulfills a new image of the reporter as socially concerned, ethical and, above all, committed to uncovering the impersonal truth.

The outlook of this new reporter is explored in several films of the 1960s. This reporter is, as we have seen, socially concerned, but the society is dominated by organizations. Such a society has whole classes of outcasts and the jour-

nalist must resort to the equivalent of spying in order to report on them. This appears to be the meaning of the sudden appearance, in films of the 60s, of disguise as the reporter's method.

In *Shock Corridor* (1960) for instance, the reporter poses as a schizophrenic in order to enter a mental hospital to do an expose. Unfortunately this experience leaves him actually and permanently insane; this is one of the few examples in all these films in which deception does not pay off for a journalist. In *Black Like Me* (1964) the reporter, aiming to explain to whites what it is like to be black, chemically darkens his skin. His deception is ethically questionable. But viewed in the context of the civil rights struggle of the 60s, the film presents the press as an agent for positive social change. In a smaller and less noble example of the disguise motif, the free lance photographer in *Blow-up* (1966) dresses as a vagrant in order to photograph a shelter for homeless men.

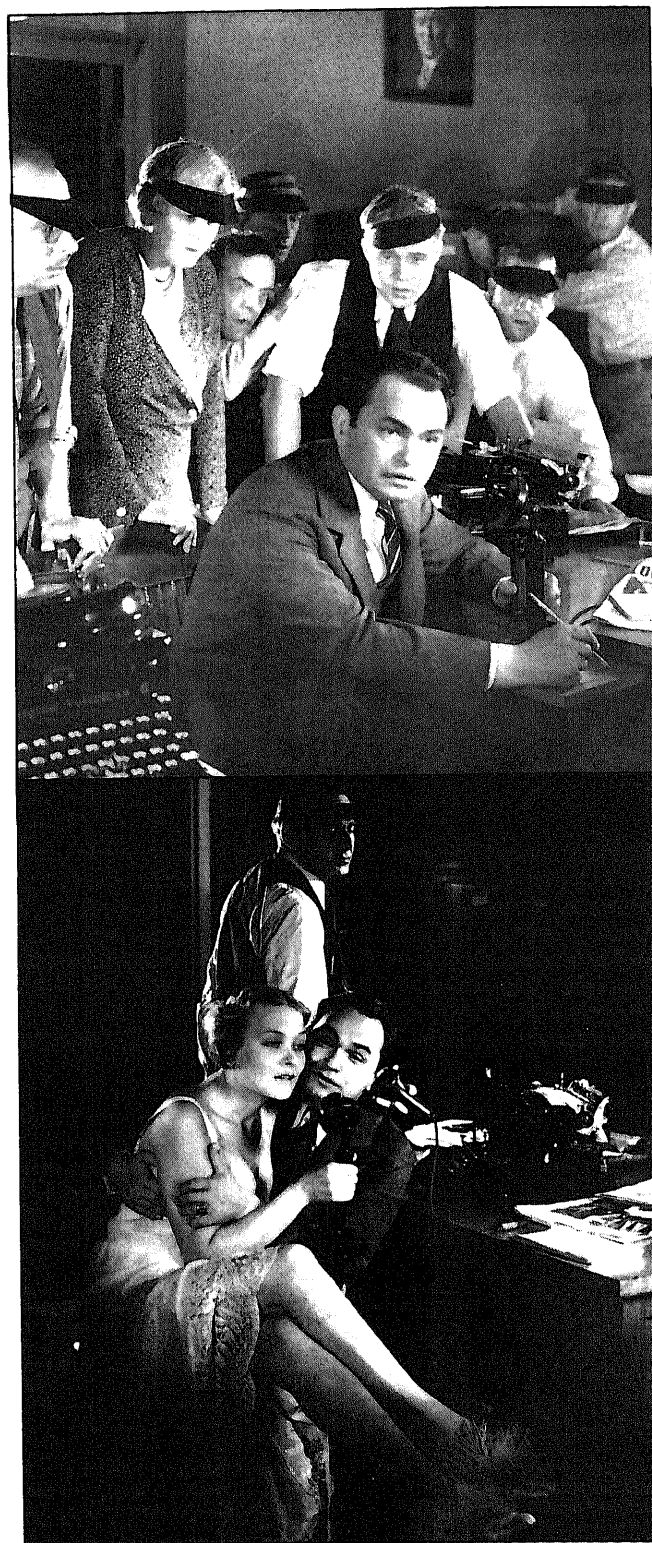
The primary reason for the use of disguise, I have suggested, is the isolation of the press. This is depicted in its most extreme form in *The Green Berets* (1968). Here the reporter's target is another institution—the Army in the Vietnam War. In his search for truth he is led to the opposite of disguise, namely conversion. As a civilian his anti-war stance satisfies his editor but is challenged by a Green Beret officer. Interested in finding out the truth, he joins the Green Berets in Vietnam, where his perception of the war quickly comes to agree with theirs. It is only when he becomes more identified with the military than the press that he knows the truth, according to this movie. But then, as he explains, his editor will no longer print his stories.⁶ While joining other 1960s films in depicting the reporter as morally and physically courageous, *The Green Berets* shows that the press cannot overcome its own isolation, thus rejecting it as a source of public knowledge.

The reporters in these films suspect a discrepancy between reality and the media's picture of it. With this conviction they decide to independently explore a socially or politically sensitive issue to derive the truth, but their approach to truth is quite simplistic. They expect to have truth revealed to them automatically and unambiguously by their direct experience, and to convey it adequately by standard reporting practices. They do not perceive truth as socially constructed or as related to ideology, nor do they probe the implications of packaging their reports to fit media formats. The photographer in *Blow-Up* does deal with these issues at length, but for him it is a personal rather than a journalistic matter.

The close of the 1960s, however, produced a film that relates the epistemological problems of the journalist to the organizational nature of the press and the society. As much a study of the sociology of knowledge as it is a portrayal of the journalist, *Medium Cool* (1969) is also the most perceptive of the newer films.

Medium Cool's reporter is a cinematographer for a Chicago television station. He finds that his organization's definition of reality excludes much of the world he directly experiences, such as the urban Appalachian ghetto. Although he loves shooting film, his work increases his confusion about reality and its representation. Observing the National Guard training for the 1968 Democratic National Convention, he films troops in uniform battling other troops costumed as demonstrators. Later these enacted riots actually occur, and he films those as well.

Medium Cool emphasizes that the reporter's portable



EDWARD G. ROBINSON played hard driving editor in *Five Star Final* (1931) who resurrects an old scandal about a woman in order to push up circulation. When the woman and her husband commit suicide the editor denounces journalism and quits.



SPENCER TRACY PLAYED a serious journalist and solid middle-class citizen who liked writing about sports, above, in *Woman of the Year* (1942). Katherine Hepburn was the woman. In *It Happened One Night* (1934) Clark Gable (with Claudette Colbert) played the reporter as a romantic figure.

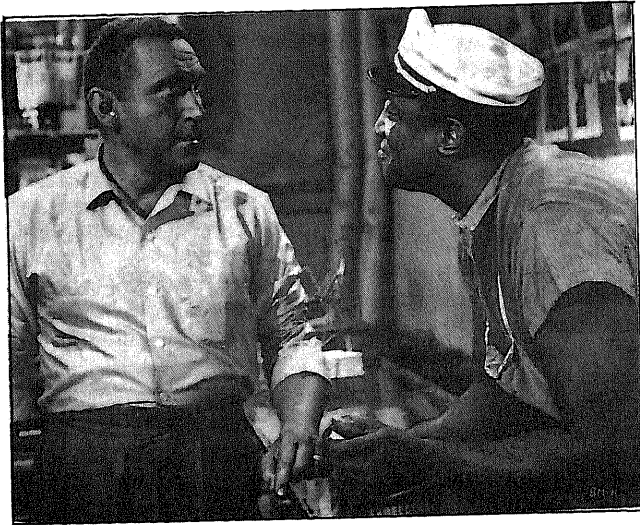
sound and film equipment are only the tiny visible part of an enormous technological apparatus that is television news. Wandering about the station, the reporter finds a large darkened room filled with monitors, winking lights and control panels over which operators work. This is where news is created out of the raw footage he produces. The implication is that media "reality," fabricated by machines to fit the television format, has no similarity to what a direct observer would perceive as the truth of the situations it purports to depict.

The organization that owns all the apparatus is a huge and faceless bureaucracy and, like the organization of *While the City Sleeps*, it coordinates its activities with the police, in this instance by providing the FBI with film footage of demonstrators. The station is an endless labyrinth of blank corridors and closed doors. The reporter almost never sees his superiors, and he is fired by an order from invisible levels of the organization. In his depiction, the reporter is on the periphery of even his own organization; he is cut off from the centers of control and decision making, and there are no avenues of opportunity in it for him. He discovers that he is little more than a functionary with a camera, in the service of unreachable owners and controllers of a medium which delivers as "news" a manufactured product that only the naive accept as documentary. *Medium Cool* thus shows that the issues of reality as directly experienced, as imitated, and as presented by the media are part of much larger issues of social power, media organization and media technology.

The press organization in *Medium Cool* is too large and secure to be threatened by competitors. Indeed, it has none. It is part of the established order of society, and it hence defines as "true" news which supports that order. The film shows the organization's idea of truth—or rather, of what can be true—may be very remote from what the reporter perceives to be true.

If *Medium Cool* challenged the whole idea of truth in the media, Watergate provided an opportunity for one of the most reassuring portraits of contemporary journalism. In depicting the exposure of Watergate, *All the President's Men* (1975) combines some earlier imagery of the newsroom with a picture of the press as the protector of democracy. The newsroom here is more organized and routinized than that of *Blessed Event* or *Meet John Doe*, but like them it is an exciting world of events and surprises, of people and opportunity. The press in this film is also on the side of truth. The *Washington Post's* editor, Ben Bradlee, becomes a hero in his willingness to risk printing something which in the normal organizational definition of reality cannot be true but which he believes is true. *All the President's Men* rehabilitates the press as a reliable source of truth and at the same time it perceptively depicts the reporters.

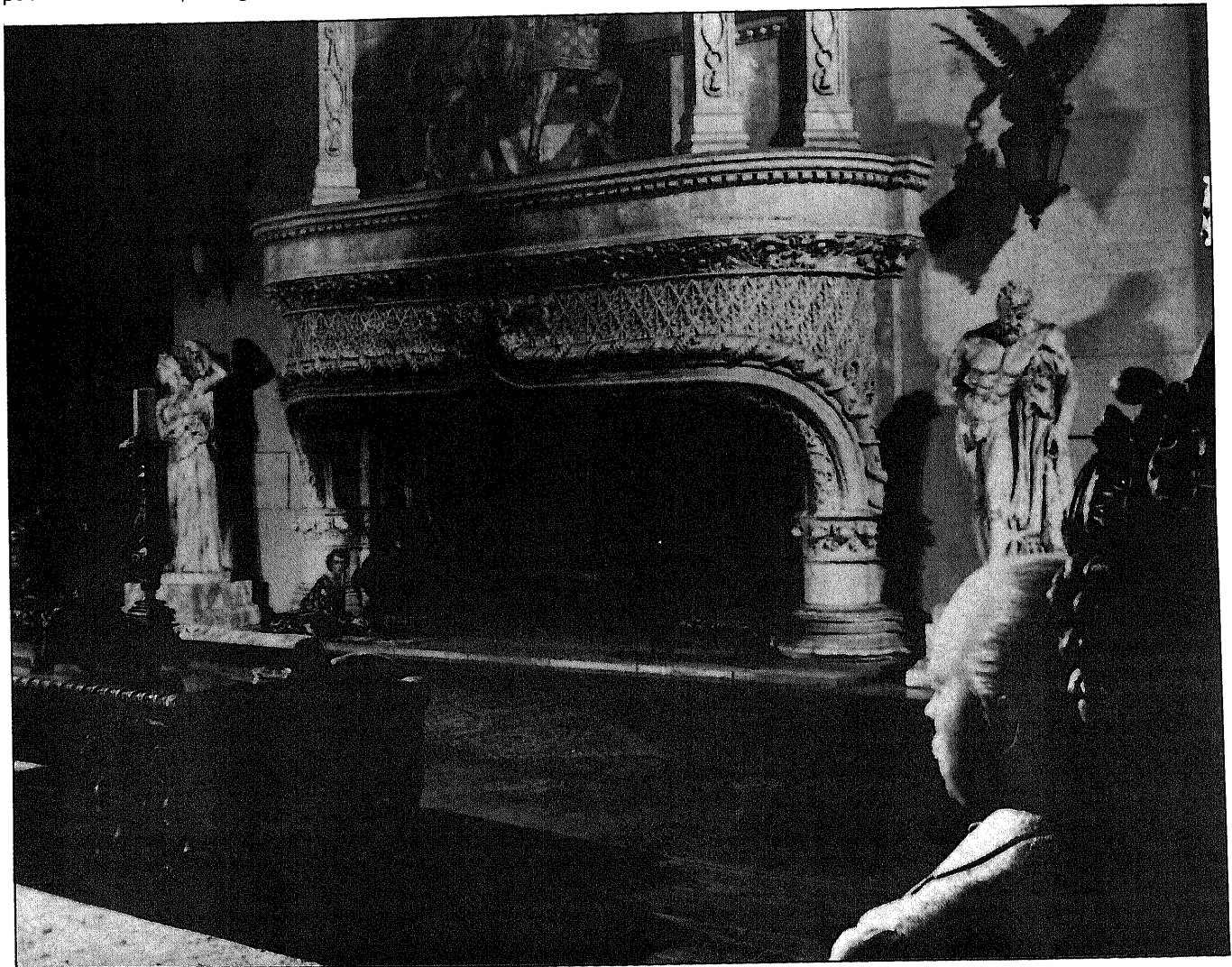
Both reporters are serious journalists, combining a nose for news with a knowledge of what the public needs to know about its government. The portrayal subtly delineates differences in their journalistic characters. Carl Bernstein (Dustin Hoffman) is of the old school; a reporter since his teens, he is not above using some trickery or charming a female source to get a story. His partner Robert Woodward (Robert Redford) is a new variety of reporter, university-



THE REPORTER AS PARTICIPANT was depicted by James Whitmore, above left, in *Black Like Me* (1964) while Burgess Meredith, above right, played a sympathetic Ernie Pyle figure in *The Story of G.I. Joe*



(1945). Below, Orson Welles, seated right, is the powerful media baron in *Citizen Kane* (1941) seeking to use the press for his own selfish interests, trying to win the public's love and its votes.



educated and unwilling to be anything but Sunday-school honest with his sources, many of whom are afraid to talk.

All the President's Men is a portrait of journalism at its most ideal, and in the history of these films it is quickly followed by the completely cynical view of *Network* (1976). *Network* resembles *The Big Carnival* in its use of the press for what can only be called an all-out attack on American society. It is nevertheless a serious portrayal that represents further development of the image of the press as an organization. It begins, like many earlier films, with the takeover of a press organization by a new owner which, in the world of television and the 1970s, is not a person but a conglomerate. The older news executives and anchormen—men to whom journalism means informing a public they respect—are fired or demoted. The conglomerate managers who replace them have no journalism background and are concerned only with profits. In pursuit of ratings, they telecast as “news” the progressive mental breakdown of an older newscaster and even have him killed on the air. So hermetically isolated is *Network's* organization that it divorces the word “news” from reference to events outside itself.

Network depicts such organizations as the ultimate reality, even—when a fired executive laments, “I’m a man without a corporation”—as the very basis of the individual’s psychological survival. *Network* is not a new picture of reporters or journalism, but essentially an update of such stories of exploitation and news mongering as *Five Star Final* and *The Big Carnival*, both of which it resembles in its plot. Its journalists have the same desperation, disregard for truth and contempt for the public as those of the earlier films.

The opposite of *Network's* media organization is the friendly world of *The Back Bay Mainline* in *Between the Lines* (1977). An alternative newspaper remaining from the 60s, the *Mainline* barely manages to stay solvent, but its poverty-stricken reporters love it and their work. Joined by a commitment to improve society, they track down and expose political corruption and commercial wrongs. Their newsroom is an informal but active place where journalism and personal lives intertwine. As in *Network*, the plot of *Between the Lines* involves the takeover of the paper by a profit-seeking owner who, to increase circulation, will change the paper. He will fill it with personality news and similar trivia; exposes of social injustices will be eliminated, along with any reporters who refuse to produce his type of news.

The present decade’s films thus present a mixed conception of the ethical situation of journalists and the press today. *All the President's Men* portrays socially conscious reporters successfully practicing journalistic ideals concerning truth and the responsibilities of the press in a democracy. The subsequent *Network* and *Between the Lines*, however, demonstrate how fragile these values are, and how quickly they fade when the press becomes simply another organization for generating profits.

The films discussed here are a representative sampling

that illustrates the recurrence and development of themes and images in Hollywood’s portrayal of the press. The remarkable popularity of the press as a subject of films can be explained by public curiosity about the press and by its unusual character as an institution. Like other central institutions which appear often in films, such as the police or the university, its importance and distinctiveness in the social scheme sets it off from the more mundane organizations with which the audience is more familiar. As an institution which daily informs our perception of the world, the press is also salient in the consciousness of the audience. At the same time, the audience lacks concrete knowledge about it as an institution, about how exactly it operates and what life in it is like. The press is hence clothed with an aura of importance and some mystery that lends it well to the dramatic requirements of popular art.⁷

The uniqueness and importance of the press is dramatized in the films by a recurring set of motifs. In the movies, reporters are usually confident, aggressive people who are young, attractive and single. The women are often equal to the men, and sometimes their betters. Reporters work on the basis of personal motivation rather than a nine-to-five routine, and their work involves them with a variety of social types, from the most respectable to the criminal. Reporters also have great personal power; they can make or break the lives of those who come to their attention and they have a behind-the-scenes knowledge of society’s secrets. Finally, in many of the films at least, the press is a field of opportunity for the resourceful and clever—journalists are seldom portrayed in routine or dead-end positions. In the movies, life in the press is glamorous and exciting, full of economic, professional and romantic possibilities.

This glamorization is constant over the history of these films even though their overall image of the press changes in the mid-50s. In general, the portrayal shifts emphasis from the individual reporter to the organization. In the newer image the reporter is a much diminished figure, less of an individual, less creative and less important to the organization.

Other film figures change in the 50s as well. As early as 1951, the classic western hero is put to rest by *High Noon*. Scientists, who in 1930s films are often lone inventors, are shown belonging to gigantic scientific-military organizations. The gangster of the 50s films too is not the grandiose, powerful figure of earlier decades. This is particularly interesting because in his manners, drive to succeed and view of society, the classic gangster figure is very like the early reporter stereotype, and in the vastness of his desire for power he closely resembles the press owner of the earlier films. This comparison illustrates most clearly the general shift in this decade to the presentation of heroes (and heroines) not as self-made individuals but as members of secure organizations and professions. The power and importance once attributed to individuals is transferred, in the 1950s, to organizations.

This revision of film imagery subtly reflects the increased importance of organization and bureaucracy in American

society in the years following World War II. Films about the press, beginning with *While the City Sleeps*, explore the meaning of these changes for journalism. The newer image embodies also developments specific to journalism—the rise of television, the newspaper's loss of dominance, the increased professionalization of journalists, the growth of cross-media ownership and, in the case of *Network*, conglomerate ownership of media.* In view of this it is not surprising that in the later image the reporter is often identified with respect to the organization; he is often either an organization man, as in *While the City Sleeps* and *Network*, or he is evicted from the organization because he cannot adapt to its requirements, as in *Medium Cool* and *Between the Lines*. The element of glamor nevertheless persists. Where the earlier films attach glamor to the reporter's individual success, in the newer image it is attached to the organization and accrues to the reporter by membership in it.

Equally persistent in these films is criticism of the press, maintained over five decades during which other institutions, with the possible exception of the police, are virtually hallowed in films. Like the glamorization, this criticism is maneuverable, always finding some aspect of the press to adhere to: if not the individual journalist, then the organization; if not the social effects of the press, then its internal human relationships. The criticism and the glamor both represent conscious interpretation rather than simply documentation of reality, and they call for explication of their meaning.

The persistent combination of glamor and criticism signifies an ambivalence toward the press, an ambivalence that crystallizes in the characterization of successful reporters. They may be unethical in attaining success, but their competence at dealing with the urban world is shown as beyond question; the reporter's success is based on ability and hard work. The success is also genuine, and its elements—fame, money, love, power—make it worth the struggle. However ill-gotten, it is never unearned, and is rarely punished. The glamorization of the press in these movies thus expresses quite traditional American beliefs about work and success and celebrates the press as an arena in which these beliefs are valid.

Yet only those journalists who are not primarily interested in success are portrayed as fulfilling the journalistic ideal of representing and informing the public. These include the reporters in *Medium Cool*, *Between the Lines* and *Black Like Me*, among others. In a very few films, such as *All the President's Men*, these reporters also have the backing of their organizations. In these portrayals not only the reporter but the press as an institution is society's source of truth about itself.

For the rest, the reporter's or the organization's concern with money or power is shown to twist journalism out of its allotted role in the ideal scheme of democratic society. This

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NOTES

1. There has been little analysis or interpretation of these films, and what has been published is largely descriptive or anecdotal. Alex Barris' *Stop the Presses: The Newspaperman in American Films* (South Brunswick and New York: A.S. Barnes, 1976) inventories the films and provides plot summaries. Deac Rossell provides a brief overview in "Hollywood and the Newsroom," *American Film* 1:1 (October, 1975), pp. 14-18. "News That's Fit to Print," pp. 20-24 in the same issue, is a reminiscence of journalism in the 1920s and 1930s by Sam Fuller, a former reporter who made some films about the press. Odd bits of information on a number of films and their writers, as well as the story of the making of *Citizen Kane*, are scattered throughout Pauline Kael's "Raising Kane" in *The Citizen Kane Book* (New York: Bantam, 1974; originally published Boston: Little Brown, 1971), pp. 1-124. Finally, brief remarks on films about the press and reporters who wrote them are often included in reviews of these films, especially those in the *New York Times*. These are conveniently collected in *The New York Times Film Reviews 1913-1974* (8 vols. New York: The New York Times Company, 1974). Reviews of later films can be located through *The New York Times Index*.
2. A number of reporters, especially during the 1930s, left journalism for more lucrative careers as scriptwriters. Barris, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-20, lists them along with their film credits.
3. William Randolph Hearst was the model for Kane. As Pauline Kael explains in "Raising Kane," *op. cit.*, pp. 99-109, the movie is in many ways false in its portrayal of his character and some of the events of his life. She explains also, however, that Hearst was able to interfere indirectly with the film's exhibition, pp. 5-9, 58-63. Hence, while *Citizen Kane* may misrepresent Hearst as a person, it is essentially correct in its depiction of the level of power wielded by a major press owner.
4. Indeed, the films about the press made in the 1930s and 1940s are virtually the only American movies before the late 1960s in which women are shown as capable individuals on equal terms with men. One of the most surprising features of the films about the press made after *While the City Sleeps* (1956) is their delineation of sex roles. With the exception of *Network*, the later films usually depict women in secondary roles in the press. In *All the President's Men* Katherine Graham is mentioned as the *Washington Post's* publisher, but the only woman shown to be instrumental in unearthing the Watergate story is a staffer who gets some information for the male reporters by sleeping with a source. Even in the counter-culture milieu of *Between the Lines*, directed by Joan Micklin Silver, the women are secretaries or girlfriends who help their boyfriend-reporters, but they do not themselves vie for center stage.
5. The depiction of the relationship of the press to policing the state becomes a

- standard element in films during the 1950s. In some cases, such depictions are based on events the press itself reported. An example is the nonfiction *Phenix City Story* (1956), about a town so corrupt it is explicitly compared to Nazi and Communist totalitarian states. In the story, exposure of the situation by reporters results in the restoration of law and democracy. The film is prefaced by an interview with the reporters involved and a display of their stories in national magazines.
6. The degree to which the depiction of the war reporter changed from World War II to Vietnam can be assessed by comparing *The Green Berets* to *The Story of G.I. Joe*. In the latter, Ernie Pyle reports without any concern for the politics of the war or the military as an institution. The film even emphasizes Pyle's view that the military was apolitical, a true army of citizens.
7. Rossell, *op. cit.*, p. 18 and Barris, *op. cit.*, p. 206 explain that with the decline of big-city newspapers and the rise of television these films have virtually disappeared from the Hollywood scene. However, the success of two new films and at least one new television series, *The Lou Grant Show*, indicates that the public maintains an interest in portrayals of the press.
8. Hollywood's portrayal of these changes is not always critical and sometimes is humorous. *Teacher's Pet* (1958), for instance, is a light comedy about an experienced editor whose publisher sends him to a school of journalism to learn his craft formally.
9. Despite the ideological significance of the American press and its importance in the political system, American films do not analyze it in explicitly political terms. Even in *All the President's Men* the newspaper is depicted as unequivocally non-political, loyal to national ideals rather than a political point of view. The newspaper owners in *Meet John Doe* and *Citizen Kane* have political intents, but they are shown to be anomalies. In any case, they bungle their own efforts. In *Medium Cool* the television station cooperates with government agencies trying to suppress dissent, but the cooperation is passive, based on the commercial necessity of maintaining good relations with the state. In general, the consequences of the American press' commercial nature are not examined in a political perspective. Some European films, however, demonstrate the possibilities of political analysis. *The Lost Honor of Katerina Blum* (Germany, 1975), for example, is the story of a young woman whose life is destroyed by a newspaper's prolonged display of her as a political criminal. The newspaper's motive is shown to be political; it actively coordinates right-wing elements in the society and the state to eradicate dissent. Like his counterparts in American films, the reporter who generates the stories is interested in success. His success is short-lived, however, for unlike the American victims, who accept their ruin or commit suicide, this reporter's victim kills him.

Accompanying this dramatic shift in focus and production have been new agricultural magazines that have helped former cotton or general farmers to adjust or to adapt new types of crops or farming techniques. Three southern dairy magazines are now available: *Sunbelt Dairyman* (1965) Nashville, *Southeastern Dairy Review* (1966) Orlando, and *Dairyman's Digest: Southern Regional Edition* (1969) Arlington, Texas.

Beef magazines have also become available to ranchers from the Carolinas to Arkansas. These include the *Alabama Cattleman* (1958), *Arkansas Cattle Business* (1965), *Southern Beef Producer* (1971) and the *Tennessee Stockman* (1965). Hog farmers in the South now subscribe to *Southern Hog Producer* (1968) and those in poultry, a highly localized type of agriculture, receive *Poultry Times* (1961) and the *Arkansas Poultry Times* (1966).

The trend toward regional specialization in agricultural publishing has carried over fully into leading national

magazines such as *Farm Journal* (circulation 1,543,964), *Progressive Farmer* (1,024,652) and *Successful Farming* (805,812). *Successful Farming*, for example, attempts to concentrate on developing a comprehensive readership in the northcentral and northeastern states, leaving coverage of the South to the *Progressive Farmer* and the special regional editions of the *Farm Journal*. *Successful Farming* editors use this regionalization as a selling point for prospective advertisers.²¹

In 1955 farm magazine publications in the United States reached a total circulation of 29 million copies. Because there were nearly 4.8 million farms in the mid 1950s this circulation figure represented an average of six magazines per farm.²² Since 1955 the total combined circulation for all farm magazines has been declining as farms and farmers become fewer in number, yet agriculture and farm publishing continue to become more specialized and more regionally distinctive.

NOTES

1. Percy Wells Bidwell and John I. Falconer, *History of Agriculture in the Northern United States: 1620-1860* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution, 1925), pp. 85-89.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 93, 97.
3. Paul H. Johnstone, "Old Ideas Versus New Ideas in Farm Life," *Yearbook of Agriculture* (Washington, D.C.: USDA, 1940), p. 115.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory, 1975-76*, 16th ed. (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1976), and *'76 Ayer Directory of Publications* (Philadelphia: Ayer Press, 1976). Ulrich's directory includes 501 periodicals published in the United States listed under headings such as agricultural economics, agricultural equipment, crop production and soils, dairying and dairy products, feed, flour, grain and poultry and livestock. Ayer's listing includes 528 agricultural publications. There is some overlap and inconsistency in the Ayer categories used to classify magazines and farm newspapers, where Ulrich's emphasizes agricultural engineering. From these lists we selected 376 magazines for regional study. We chose to exclude local and state farm newspapers and magazines which tend to be more a reflection of parochial interest and demand. Also omitted were those periodicals that related primarily to agribusiness and those which dealt with farm topics in a tangential manner such as pet care or rural electrification, university experiment stations reports and bulletins, state and federal agricultural publications, and magazines that cater to food manufacturers or farm product processors. The list includes only those magazines which currently are being published, and does not include any which have ceased publication.

6. Edward C. Kirkland, *A History of American Life*, 3rd ed. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1951).
7. Richard Bardolph, *Agricultural Literature and the Early Illinois Farmer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1948), p. 17.
8. Bidwell, *op. cit.*, pp. 332-36.
9. John T. Schlebecker and Andrew W. Hopkins, *A History of Dairy Journalism in the United States, 1810-1950* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957), p. 5.
10. George F. Lemmer, "Early Agricultural Editors and Their Farm Philosophies," *Agricultural History* 31 (1957): 3-22.
11. Schlebecker and Hopkins, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
12. Bidwell, *op. cit.*, p. 316.
13. Albert L. Demaree, *The American Agricultural Press, 1819-1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), p. 231.
14. Johnstone, *op. cit.*, p. 127.
15. Quoted in Demaree, *op. cit.*, p. 233.
16. James L.C. Ford, *Magazines for Millions: The Story of Specialized Publications* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), p. 235.
17. Kirkland, *op. cit.*, pp. 148-49.
18. James F. Evans and Rodolfo N. Salcedo, *Communications in Agriculture: The American Farm Press* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1974), p. 45.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
20. John Fraser Hart, "The Demise of King Cotton," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 67 (1977): 307-22.
21. Ford, *op. cit.*, p. 239.
22. Evans and Salcedo, *op. cit.*, p. 171. □

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is the meaning of the takeover scene that generates the plot in so many of these films. Typically a newsroom is shown with its old and honest staffers quietly going about their work. Suddenly the new owner, representing power or money, appears, and heads begin to roll. Young reporters who want to keep eating quickly think up ideas for sensationalistic, audience-grabbing stories. Repeatedly, the films show journalists choosing sensationalism, suppression of truth or outright lies in order to succeed. This is most clear in films such as *Five Star Final*, *Meet John Doe* and *Network*, which show the direct relationship of sensationalism to success in the press. The movies thus analyze journalism's failure as its adherence to the norms of the society instead of to its contrasting ideals.

Though we can assume, as with all works of popular art, that the audience shares the ideas and attitudes expressed in

these films, they do not represent the entirety of the public's attitude toward the press. In the real world, the press has special legal status and government and the courts, also mindful of public views, are usually rather careful about infringing upon its privileges.⁹ One must conclude that the public approves of the principle of a free press and the idea of the press as watchdog. In the real world, the public identifies with the press.

In the movies, however, the press is not an abstraction but a concrete world of people in dramas of money and power. More intent on the actual than the ideal, the films de-sanctify the press, much as the press itself impudently reports on government. As the press serves as a watchdog on government, so Hollywood, likewise on behalf of the public and with a like commercial basis, keeps an eye on the press. □