

## FACT OR FICTION: HOLLYWOOD LOOKS AT THE NEWS

**Loren Ghiglione**

Dean, Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University

**Joe Saltzman**

Director of the IJPC, associate dean, and professor of journalism  
USC Annenberg School for Communication

Curators

“Hollywood Looks at the News: the Image of the Journalist in Film and Television” exhibit  
Newseum, Washington D.C.  
2005

*“Listen to me. Print that story, you’re a dead man.”*

*“It’s not just me anymore. You’d have to stop every newspaper in the country now and you’re not big enough for that job. People like you have tried it before with bullets, prison, censorship. As long as even one newspaper will print the truth, you’re finished.”*

*“Hey, Hutcheson, that noise, what’s that racket?”*

*“That’s the press, baby. The press. And there’s nothing you can do about it. Nothing.”*  
Mobster threatening Hutcheson, managing editor of the *Day* and the editor’s response in *Deadline U.S.A.* (1952)

*“You left the camera and you went to help him...why didn’t you take the camera if you were going to be so humane?”*

*“...because I can’t hold a camera and help somebody at the same time.*

*“Yes, and by not having your camera, you lost footage that nobody else would have had. You see, you have to make a decision whether you are going to be part of the story or whether you’re going to be there to record the story.”*

Max Brackett, veteran television reporter, to neophyte producer-technician Laurie in *Mad City* (1997)

An editor risks his life to expose crime and print the truth. A veteran TV news reporter berating a cub broadcaster for not getting the story on video because of her concern for a wounded man. These conflicting views of the journalist are part of a continuing barrage of images flowing from movie and TV screens that have created, in large part, the public’s perception of the role of journalism and the media in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

For some, the reporter conjures warm memories of a favorite actor phoning in a story that will save the world. For others, the reporter is part of a harassing pack of newsmen and women relentlessly hounding an innocent victim. But for most, the reporter is perceived as a strange mixture of hero and scoundrel eliciting adoration and hatred, affection and scorn. These images have built a love-hate relationship in the American consciousness that is at the center of its confusion about the media in American society today.

Surveys continually show that most Americans desire, above all, a free and unbiased press, one that is always there to protect them from authority and to provide a free flow of diverse information. But these surveys also show that most Americans harbor a deep suspicion about journalists and the media, worrying about their perceived power, their meanness and negativism, their attacks on institutions and people, their intrusiveness and callousness, their arrogance and bias.

The reason most Americans have contradictory feelings about their free press is all at once simple and complex: It happened in the movies and on the television screens. There have been more than 4,000 films and television programs that feature journalists, countless others that include media as part of their stories. In addition, by mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, real-life journalists vied for attention with the established fictional reporters and editors carefully chiseled into the public consciousness in the movies and on TV. Viewers, for the first time, could see, live in their homes the messy job of reporting news. And they didn't care much for what they saw. They wanted the information, but they often weren't pleased about the methods of getting that information. Reporters and anchors under deadline pressure didn't behave well. Much of the time they seemed arrogant, self-absorbed, insulting, rude and occasionally wrong. The public identified with the person being grilled or pursued by the journalist, and began questioning the media's methods and techniques. They also came to admire real-life journalism heroes such as Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of the Washington Post, TV network news anchors Walter Cronkite of CBS, and Chet Huntley and David Brinkley of NBC, and, often with mixed feelings, network reporters in the field such as Dan Rather of CBS and Peter Arnett of CNN, and national celebrity interviewers such as Barbara Walters of ABC and Larry King of CNN.

Whether the journalist was a hero or a villain usually depended on motive.

**Heroes:** Reporters, editors and news broadcasters can get away with almost anything as long as the end result is *in the public interest*. They can lie, cheat, distort, bribe, betray or violate any ethical code as long as they expose some political or business corruption, solve a murder, catch a thief or save an innocent. Some journalists, the war correspondents and the investigative reporters in particular, often act more like soldiers or detectives. They usually live up to good journalism standards, only to be killed or left in great danger at the end of the film.

**Villains:** The images most remembered by the public may well be that of journalists as scoundrels, the worst kinds of villains because they have used the precious commodity of public confidence in the press for selfish ends. If the result is *not* in the public interest, then no matter what these journalists accomplish, no matter how much they struggle with their conscience or try to do the right thing, all is lost. Evil has won. The only possible salvation is resignation or death.

## The Image Begins

*“That stinks. Aren’t you going to mention the Post? Don’t we take any credit?”*

*“I’ve got that in the second paragraph.”*

*“Who’s going to read the second paragraph? Fifteen years I’ve been telling you how to write a newspaper story. Have I got to do everything? Get the story. Write the story.”*

*“Listen you crazy baboon. I can think a better newspaper story than you can write.”*

*“You ought to go back to chasing pictures.”*

*“You ungrateful windbag....”*

This exchange between a reporter and his editor in *The Front Page* (1931) is one of the memorable images of the journalist in action that have been with us for the last century. Journalists immediately were defined on screen by their brashness and cunning, their wisecracks and their passion for the story. The story above all else. They were creatures of the city, familiar with its fast pace, crowds and the opportunities to get ahead. They reflected the American audience’s preference for action and accomplishment rather than ideology. They embodied the myth of the self-reliant individual who pits nerves and resourcefulness against an unfair world.

Almost every media film has at least one major argument between the reporter and the editor or TV news director or executive producer. The image was reinforced forever in *The Front Page* when the reporter Hildy Johnson (Pat O’Brien) and the editor Walter Burns (Adolphe Menjou) went at it from first reel to last. In 1940, *His Girl Friday* added sex to the mixture by turning Hildy Johnson into a woman (Rosalind Russell). Johnson and Burns (Cary Grant) spoke faster than most humans can think. Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau picked up the argument 30 years later in a remake of *The Front Page* (1974), and Christine Colleran (Kathleen Turner), a TV reporter and Sully (Burt Reynolds), the news director, continued the all-out fight in a 1987 remake, *Switching Channels*.

A newsroom, no matter what the medium, is always filled with fast-talking, bright people whose main work is to interview strangers, investigate a situation, get answers and develop a news story. Since journalists are always finding out something about someone, they create countless narratives with good beginnings, middles and endings. The newspaper gave the moviemaker an endless flow of scenarios in an atmosphere that soon became so familiar to movie audiences that journalists could be thrown into a film without the scriptwriter having to worry about motivation or plot.

By the early 1920s, audiences already knew that reporters were always involved in some kind of story, no matter how bizarre or melodramatic. In the process, viewers not only got large doses of entertainment, but also a series of lasting impressions about the media, updated over and over, that have stayed in the public mind for a century. In the end, it may not matter if the images are true or embellished or pure fiction. For the millions of people who see film after film and TV program after TV program, the images defines the journalists and the media as the public

believes them to be. Journalists themselves are not immune from the video images. Many go into journalism because they want to be Clark Kent or Hildy Johnson or Brenda Starr or Torchy Blane. And when they become journalists they often emulate the images they know so well. Sometimes the image becomes the reality they fashion it to be.

A journalist without a voice is only a shadow of the real McCoy. The images at first didn't speak, but all of the Jekyll-and-Hyde stereotypes of the newspaperman and woman were there in the pages of melodramatic fiction and in the silent films often based on that fiction. People who read newspapers rarely had the slightest idea how the news came to them until they read about it in lurid dime novels or saw it on the silent screen. Although some newspaper novels won popularity and became best sellers, they never attracted the mass audience the newspaper film did. On the big screen, the image of the journalist was magnified and put in noisy motion. Newspaper stories were filled with adventure, mystery and romance. They were tough, urban, modern talkies. Right from the beginning of film, the world of the newspaper was an easily accessible and recognizable background.

The first recorded newspaper film, *Horsewhipping the Editor*, was made in 1900. It showed an editor being attacked by an irate man for some unexplained offense. A scrubwoman and a small boy come to the editor's rescue and rout the attacker.

The age of yellow journalism (a name derived from a newspaper comic character called the "Yellow Kid") was in full swing. From the 1890s, yellow journalism had, in the words of the historian Edwin Emery, "choked up the news channels on which the common people depended with a shrieking, gaudy, sensation-loving, devil-may-care kind of journalism," twisting stories into the "form best suited for sales by howling newsboys." The people loved it. Even conservative newspapers were forced to take on a yellow hue to sell their products. By 1900, nearly a third of the metropolitan dailies were turning news stories into melodramas that could be summed up in one banner headline. It was the perfect time for moving pictures.

## **THE HEROES**

### **The Male Reporter**

Newshounds who worked for print become newshounds who work for broadcasting and the Internet and are usually portrayed as flawed human beings – like everyone in the audience, not all good and not all bad – trying to get the story at all costs. They may lie or cheat or act more like detectives than reporters, but they are usually forgiven their trespasses because the end result favors the public.

In the beginning, reporters seemed like members of the audience and the audience identified with them. They were down-to-earth, used charm and wit to succeed rather than connections or inherited power, and were paid a pittance. They were part of a democratic profession – women

had almost equal status with men. There was a pecking order, however, regardless of sex. Gossip columnists were at the lowest end, reporters somewhere in the middle, editors above reporters and at the top are foreign correspondents and war correspondents.

For generations of moviegoers, the male reporter, cigarette dangling from his mouth, plays poker and drinks as if his life depended on it. He was never called an alcoholic, just a boozehound who always found a drink from a hidden bottle in his desk or the bar around the corner from the newsroom. A few films made alcoholism a major issue and dealt with it. But most movies treated drinking as part of the character of the journalist that made it possible for him – and occasionally for her – to survive the job. Reporting was hard work with long hours. Who would deny the reporter a drink or two before he solved a murder or exposed a crooked district attorney? Only when it interfered with the journalist's job did alcohol become a problem as in *Come Fill The Cup* (1951), when editor Julian Cuscaden (Larry Keating) comes up to reporter Lou Marsh (James Cagney) who is banging out a story at deadline. "What do you think you're doing," asks the editor. "What's the idea?" answers the reporter. The editor reads what the reporter has typed up: "'All the dead were strangers.' Good lead." The reporter doesn't have time for compliments. A plane crashed into a mountain. The editor looks at him and says, "That crash was five days ago." The reporter wonders out loud, "What do you suppose happened to those five days." The editor tells him, "You'll have to find out on your own time, Lou. You're fired."

Along with booze in the desk drawers came such lines as: "Stop the presses!" Or, "They won't beat me on this story!" Or, "Leave four columns open on the front page." Or, "Don't let the guys on the copy desk bother you. They're just a bunch of butchers at heart. They'd cut the Lord's Prayer down to a one-line squib." Or, "How many times have I been wrong when I have a hunch?" Or, "If I don't come back with the biggest story you've ever handled, you can put me back in short pants and make me marbles editor." Or, "We've got the biggest story in the world." Or, "I'm through with your dirty rag!" Or, "If the headline is big enough, it makes the news big enough." Or, "There's enough circulation in that man to start a shortage in the ink market." Or, "If there's no news, I'll go out and bite a dog." Any reference among reporters to ethics, however, produced gut-splitting laughter.

The reporter in the movies has an around-the-clock obsession with news. Newsroom camaraderie and rivalry replace spouse and family. Reporters and editors marry the newspaper making a private life almost impossible. Women who are not in journalism are usually viewed as obstructionists who want men to relinquish the jobs that give them their whole identity. Women are discussed with disdain as the enemies of men's pleasure as well as of their calling.

Steve Banks, the Express' ace reporter in *Big News* (1929) and Hildy Johnson in *The Front Page* (1931) are the essence of the reporter found in the newspaper novels and films that came before them and would come after them. Banks is married to a sob sister, has a friendly if adversarial relationship with the city editor and is involved in a running battle with the elderly editor, J.W. Addison (Charles Sellon). Banks, a sharp investigative reporter who wisecracks his way out of drunken screw-ups, sums up what newspaper reporters have felt at one time or another in every newsroom in America: "I'm sick of this bum racket anyhow. It isn't even a racket. It's a disease that gets into your blood and wrings you out like an old mop. What are newspapers good for?"

The reporter is speaking so fast all the editor can do is listen: “Something to put under carpets. Plugs for rat holes. Wrapping paper for bootleggers. Bed quilts for bums in the park, and a lot of other things.” The editor knows how to get back at the reporter when he yells the worst thing you can yell at a reporter: “You’re not even a good newspaperman...your wife’s a better newspaperman than you are.”

Hildy Johnson’s rant about journalists in the original Broadway play was repeated, almost verbatim, in the two sound films based on the play and the creative rewrite, *His Girl Friday*: “Journalists! Peeking through keyholes! Running after fire engines like a lot of coach dogs! Waking people up in the middle of the night to ask them what they think of Mussolini [or in other versions: “...compassionate marriage,” “...to ask them if Hitler’s going to start another war” “...Aimee Semple McPherson.”]. Stealing pictures off old ladies of their daughters that get attacked in Grove Park. A lot of daffy buttinskis, swelling around with holes in their pants, borrowing nickels from office boys! And for what? So a million hired girls and motormen’s wives will know what’s going on.” Johnson then tells the other reporters, “I don’t have to have anyone tell me about a newspaper. I’ve been a newspaperman for 15 years...You want to know something, you’ll all end up on a copy desk, gray-haired, hunch-backed slobs...when you’re 90.”

Few movies depicted the reporter’s work as it really is. Two key exceptions were P.G. McNeal (James Stewart) in *Call Northside 777* (1948) and Robert Woodward (Robert Redford) and Carl Bernstein (Dustin Hoffman) in *All the President’s Men* (1976). McNeal is a plodding, at first reluctant, Chicago Times newspaperman who gradually comes to believe in the innocence of a man already in jail for 11 years. Kelly (Lee J. Cobb) is his gruff, but sympathetic editor. When the innocent man’s mother begs the reporter to help her, he says, “I’m afraid I couldn’t do that. I’m only a reporter. I just write the story.” The film, a realistic docudrama based on a true story, shows the hard work of reporting. Even though McNeal at one point deceives the police by not revealing he is a reporter, he generally is depicted as a hard-working, ethical reporter who will do anything to get at the truth.

Nearly 30 years later, *All the President’s Men* made larger-than-life heroes out of reporters Woodward and Bernstein. Appropriately enough, they were played by two of the decade’s most accomplished and popular actors – Dustin Hoffman and Robert Redford. Gone were the smart-ass reporters hurling insults at their editors. Nobody yelled, “Stop the Presses.” There were no fisticuffs with criminals. Even so, *All the President’s Men* was still an old-fashioned reporter-as-detective film – only this time reporters were ferreting out corruption at the highest levels. And this time, the audience knew it was real life. Everyone knew that Woodward-Bernstein were real reporters uncovering real corruption and unseating a real president, Richard Nixon.

Woodward and Bernstein are shown doing the exhausting and difficult job of checking out one lead after another. Doors are slammed in their faces when they say they’re from The Washington Post. They tell one woman, “You can talk to us. We don’t reveal our sources,” and she yells at them: “You people. You think you can come into my home, ask a few questions, have me destroy the reputations of men that I work for and respect. Do you understand loyalty? Have you ever heard of loyalty?” Then she slams the door in their faces. Still they don’t give up. Their editor, Ben Bradlee (Jason Robards) is constantly complaining, “Damn it. When is somebody going to go on the record in this story? You guys are about to write a story that says

the former attorney general, the highest-ranking law enforcement officer in this country is a crook. Just be sure you're right." When Bernstein calls the attorney general to verify the story, he says, "You tell your publisher, tell Katie Graham, she's going to get her tit caught in a big wringer if that's published." Editor Bradlee quizzes the reporter then tells him, "Well, cut the word 'tit' and print it. This is a family newspaper." He adds, "I can't do the reporting for my reporters, which means I have to trust them. And I hate trusting anybody. Run that baby." Then he walks out of the empty city room.

Later the two reporters go to see Bradlee outside his home because they're afraid of their conversation being bugged. Bradlee tells them: "You know the results of the latest Gallup Poll. Half the country never even heard of the word Watergate. Nobody gives a shit. You guys are probably pretty tired, right? Well you should be. Go on home. Get a nice hot bath. Rest up 15 minutes, then get your asses back in gear. We're under a lot of pressure, you know, and you put us there. Nothing's riding on this except the First Amendment and the Constitution, freedom of the press and maybe the future of the country. Not that any of that matters, but if you guys fuck up again, I'm going to get mad. Good night."

Woodward-Bernstein became big-screen national heroes not only because they exposed corruption at the highest level of government, resulting in the only resignation of an American president, but also because they looked so good doing it.

"The Pelican Brief" (1993) also involves a conspiracy, this one involving the murders of two Supreme Court justices and a graduate Tulane law student who creates a theoretical "Pelican Brief," which turns out to reveal the reasons behind the killings. Denzel Washington is Gray Grantham, a well-known investigative reporter for the Washington Herald who ends up risking his life for a sensational story. In the book on which the film is based, the journalist is Caucasian, but in the movie, the journalist hero is African-American, one of the few black heroes in the history of journalism movies. Washington plays the role without any reference to ethnicity, although the love scenes with Julia Roberts have been toned down or eliminated. It is established early in the film that Grantham is a respected journalist who has access to the corridors of power. Real-life journalist Edwin Newman is shown interviewing him on television. Grantham has sources everywhere and he's not above using lying, deception and trickery to get the information he needs. Underneath his sophisticated demeanor and celebrity, he's the age-old crime reporter doing whatever he can to break the story.

The old-fashioned drunken, womanizing, wisecracking reporter with a nose for news returns in *True Crimes* (1999). Steve Everett (Clint Eastwood) of the Oakland Tribune saves a convicted killer from execution at the last minute. Everett sleeps with the city editor's wife, drinks almost nonstop and ignores his wife and daughter. He is as reprehensible as any of the 1930s' newshounds, but like them when he smells a story, he becomes a reporter's reporter. Interviewing the prisoner, he stops the conversation cold and points to his nose. The prisoner wants to know if this is some kind of a joke. Everett says: "No, it's no joke. That's my nose. To tell you the pitiful truth, that's all I have in life. When my nose tells me something stinks, I've got to have faith in it, just like you have your faith in Jesus. When my nose is working well, I know there's truth out there somewhere. If it isn't working well, they might as well drive me off a cliff, because I'm nothing."

Everett's editor knows what his reporter will say before he even says it: "I don't have to listen to you. I'm looking at you. I'm looking and I can see a reporter who's about to tell me he has a hunch." Everett tells the editor the convict is innocent and the editor says, "So you're trying to tell me that you want to turn a routine execution piece into some big fight-for-justice story and what, that will give me an excuse for me to stand up for you when [the city editor] asks me to transfer you to the toilet. Is that it? Huh?" Everett says he needs the story and tries to explain how he messed up before: "I was drinking in those days. You lose your nose when you're drinking. My nose is back."

Everett may be a weathered, beaten boozehound, but no one can root out a story better, and the film spends an extraordinary amount of time showing an obsessive reporter at work, putting the public interest ahead of his own personal and professional welfare.

### **The Sob Sister – Front Page Woman**

*"You'll never make a newspaperwoman."*

*"Am I fired?"*

*"No. I still think you'll make a newspaperman."*

Daily Record city editor Al Holland to novice Lulu Smith in *Forbidden* (1932)

Female journalists in silent films faced almost the same problems as many females face in today's media. In real life, few ever heard the word *sob sister* until the movies popularized the term. It summed up the dichotomy of the movie female reporter – she was considered an equal doing a man's work, a career woman drinking and arguing toe-to-toe with any male in the shop, and more than capable of holding her own against everyone and anything, a real tough sister, yet one who often showed her soft side and cried long and hard when the man she loved treated her like a sister instead of a lover. By the end of the film, most sob sisters, no matter how tough or how independent they were during the film, would give up everything for marriage, children and a life at home. Female moviegoers shared the dichotomy. They loved the way the woman gave it to the man throughout the film, but they refused to trust any woman who put career before family and children. So it didn't bother them if the woman made a 180-degree turnabout at the end of the film. That was the natural order of things and she didn't have any choice. In fact, to audiences throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, she shouldn't have wanted any choice.

Women rarely became editors or publishers, but as reporters they more than held their own against their male counterparts. In the 1930s, sob sisters underwent a form of masculinization, adopting male-associated names and ways of dressing designed to downplay their femininity and make them look more like one of the boys. For female actors in the 1930s and beyond, reporter roles gave them an opportunity to be top dog in a man's world and they jumped at the chance. Practically every major actress of the period showed up in tailored coat and pants to fight the



males in the newsroom, to assert her individualism and independence, at least until the final reel, and to become one of the few positive role models working outside the home for women in the movies.

The most dominant female film reporter of the 1930s, Torchy Blane, was played by everyone's notion of what a female reporter looked and sounded like – the fast-talking Glenda Farrell. No one else in films better epitomized the aggressive, self-assured, independent female reporter. One reason for this may have been that the Torchy Blane character was originally a male reporter named Kennedy, the hero of a series of pulp magazine stories by Frederick Nebel. In the movies, Blane went after fast-breaking, sensational stories as aggressively as any newsman. Her scoops were usually in print before her male counterparts figured out what was going on. She was no sob sister, no gushy old maid, no masculine-looking lady, “no society dame after the woman's angle,” as one critic put it. “She was an honest to goodness pencil pusher who scrambled for her story along with the so-called stronger sex – and got it.” As she told her publisher in *Fly Away Baby* (1937), “You always told me to play up the feminine angle in my stories. A woman doing anything is good copy. Here I'd be [a woman] against two men and I'll beat them too.” Beneath the hard-boiled exterior beat a soft-boiled romantic heart. She was head over heels in love with a fairly dense police detective who occasionally tossed a barb in her direction: “You wait here, Torchy” he says in *Smart Blonde* (1936). She tells him, “Oh, but I want to go with you.” He tells her: “This rat hole is no place for a woman.” She protests: “But I'm a newspaperman.” He tells her, “Well, you just sit quiet and maybe nobody will notice it.” Farrell played the Herald reporter in seven of the nine films in the Torchy Blane series, which ran from 1936 to 1939.

Blane went after fast-breaking, sensational stories as aggressively as any newsman. Her scoops were usually in print before her male counterparts figured out what was going on. She was no sob sister, no gushy old maid, no masculine-looking lady, “no society dame after the woman's angle,” as one critic put it. “She was an honest to goodness pencil pusher who scrambled for her story along with the so-called stronger sex – and got it. She was a reporter who scrambled for her story and got it: “I've got ink in my blood and a nose for news that needs something besides powder” (*Blondes at Work*, 1938). The popularity of this series was mostly due to Farrell's performance as the brassy female reporter. Farrell told one interviewer, “The cinematic sob sisters were caricatures of newspaperwomen as I knew them. So before I undertook to do the first Torchy, I determined to create a real human being – and not an exaggerated comedy type. I met those [female reporters] who visited Hollywood and watched them work on visits to New York City. They were generally young, intelligent, refined and attractive.”

It was certainly not surprising that fictional detective Nancy Drew would emulate all the female reporters she saw in the movies when she decided to try her hand at journalism in *Nancy Drew, Reporter* (1939) becoming the youngest sob sister of them all. It was the most independent and intelligent role model for young women the movies had to offer in the 1930s. When an editor says he doesn't understand why anyone would be simple-minded enough to want to work on a newspaper, she tells him: “Journalism is a very noble and glorious career. With all of the adventure and romance and everything, I should think you'd just love it.” Later, after she switches an assignment slip to get a better story, she is chastised by the same editor. Her excuse? “I thought reporters always did things like that – at least they do in the movies – and besides, it

says right in my textbook on journalism that a newspaperman or woman must stop at nothing to get the news and if she ever intends to impress the editor, she must be willing to do much more than just what the assignment calls for. So there.”

*Brenda Starr* – “Starr” stood for star reporter – came alive in 1940. First a comic-strip creation of Dale Messick, Brenda Starr eventually became a heroine of Hollywood movies and TV series, a subject of popular song and postage stamp, star of breakfast cereal-box pin and bubble-gum cigar, and idol of Charlayne Hunter-Gault, Anna Quindlen and other big-league journalists. The Johnny Mandel-David Frishberg song caught the spirit of the green-eyed, redheaded Daily Flash reporter. “Hang on, here's the latest flash, bank robbers escape with cash, could be in stolen car, police are wondering where they are, I bet they don't get far. Who'll flush them out without a doubt, who'll write the lead we've got to read, who's got the scoop, who's got the poop, our own super-duper super reporter Brenda Starr.”

From the beginning Starr's clothes helped define each generation's taste in women's fashions. In the 1940s she sported open-toed shoes, monkey fur-trimmed coat and flying-saucer hat. A 1986 movie, released first in Japan and not shown in the United States until 1992, depicted Brooke Shields as Starr, clotheshorse extraordinaire. Attired in Bob Mackie costumes, she worries more about running her stockings than running down crooks. The movie, incidentally, fails to show Messick, but features her male assistant drawing Brenda Starr. Messick – who never let her assistants draw Brenda Starr – said, “That's the story of women getting ahead in the world.”

An earlier *Brenda Starr, Reporter* movie with Joan Woodbury better captures the fireball reporter. In “Taken for a Ride,” Chapter 3 of the 1944 serial, she tackles the mob. A lobby card shouts: “Said the Lords of Crime, 'Get Brenda Starr!’” Women journalists, real and make-believe, have found a role model in the action hero. Candice Bergen, who played TV journalist Murphy Brown, writes in her autobiography: “As a child, what I had wanted to be was Brenda Starr – crack reporter in high-fashion clothes on dangerous assignments...”

The image stayed intact until *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-1977) brought the old-fashioned newspaper family into the electronic era. *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* created a positive image of broadcast journalists and the local television newsroom. It provided the defining images of the journalist in the 1970s. The 168 half-hour episodes that aired from 1970 to 1977 have been in reruns ever since.

Mary Richards (Mary Tyler Moore), the assistant news producer for television station WJM-TV in Minneapolis, is in her 30s, independent and self-sufficient, but still vulnerable and even at times dependent on men. She's the updated version of the single career woman in newspaper movies who wanted to do the best job she could no matter what.

When news director-executive news producer Lou Grant (Ed Asner) first interviews Richards, she complains that he's asking her personal questions that have nothing to do with “my qualifications for this job.” He says, “You know what, you've got spunk.” Richards proudly answers, “Well, yes.” Grant spits at her: “I hate spunk.” Grant eventually promotes Richards to producer of the WJM 6 O'clock News.

Richards considers her newsroom co-workers as her family: “I just wanted you to know that sometimes I get concerned about being a career woman. I get to thinking my job is too important to me and I tell myself that the people I work with are just the people I work with and not my family. And last night I thought, what is a family anyway? They’re just people who make you feel less alone and really loved and that’s what you’ve done for me. Thank you for being my family.”

Twenty-three years later in the year 2000, Mary Richards returns in the made-for-TV movie “Mary and Rhoda.” She has become an in-studio producer at ABC News, but quits her job in 1992 so she could spend more time with her daughter. Now Mary Richards Cronin is 60, widowed and penniless because her politician husband has overextended the family finances on risky loans for his campaigns. She finally gets a job as segment producer of WNYT news, hired by a 33-year-old news director Jonath Semeir (Elon Gold), who needs to hire someone old enough to counteract charges of ageism. She eventually proves her mettle and ends up a confident, mature newswoman. In a final confrontation with the news director, she explains that she was taught that news is about something. He argues that news is different today. She protests: “No, it’s not. Just the way we tell it is different.” She complains that she does not belong in a place where the news is sensationalized, then adds, “I like this job. I’m good at it and you know it.” The news director relents and the two reach an uneasy truce.

*Murphy Brown* (1988-1998) was the sob sister updated into a strong, yet vulnerable TV on-air journalist. For many, Murphy Brown is as real as TV newswomen Diane Sawyer or Barbara Walters. Murphy Brown (Candice Bergen), the sharp-tongued reporter for the live CBS-TV newsmagazine, “F.Y.I.,” got her job in 1977, the same year Mary Richards was fired from WJM and the same year Lou Grant took over as city editor for The Los Angeles Tribune.

The fine line between reality and fiction is obliterated by the “Murphy Brown” TV series. Real journalists are frequent guests and they talk to Murphy Brown, male anchor Jim Dial (Charles Kimbrough) and the rest of the “F.Y.I.” newsmagazine staff as equals. Away from the television program, Murphy Brown is treated in the media as if she really exists. When Vice President Dan Quayle gets into a national debate over single mothers with Murphy Brown, reality and fiction merge. Brown and her friend Frank Fontana (Joe Regalbuto), the investigative reporter, listen incredulously as Quayle says on TV: “It doesn’t help matters when prime time TV has Murphy Brown” – Fontana cries out, “He is talking about you!” – “symbolizing today’s intelligent, highly paid professional woman mocking the importance of fathers by bearing a child alone and calling it just another life-style choice.” When Quayle says that Murphy Brown is glamorizing single motherhood, the pregnant reporter asks Fontana, “Glamorizing single motherhood? What planet is he on. Look at me, Frank, am I glamorous?”

In one almost surrealistic episode, Brown is asked to appear on a sitcom featuring a fictional journalist. Real-life journalist Connie Chung chides her for doing just what Chung is doing on “Murphy Brown.” It’s the classic inside joke: “Murphy can I be honest with you. I think it’s wrong for a journalist of your stature to appear in a sitcom. Once you cross that line, you undermine your credibility. I feel so strongly about that.” Brown responds: “Well, Connie, that sounds awfully noble and righteous but I bet if you’d been in my place and those network people came to you begging you to help their show and, yes, offering you the chance to do something a

little different, a little intriguing, something tells me you'd be singing a different tune. I bet I know what you would have told them.” Chung tells her just before she walks out, “Exactly what I did tell them, ‘No thanks.’” In another instance of reality and fiction merging, Producer Miles Silverberg (Grant Shaud) tells Brown: “Let me remind you about something, Murphy. This is a job, not make believe. We're not doing ‘The Mary Tyler Moore Show’ here. There's no audience laughing at every cute little thing you say. This is the real world. So when I tell you you're doing a story, you just don't say, ‘Oh Mr. Grant I don't want to,’ You do it.”

In the program's 10-year-run, practically every major broadcast journalist appears on the program – most of the *60 Minutes* correspondents, major female news reporters and anchors, broadcast veterans Charles Kuralt and Walter Cronkite. And when Murphy and Jim greet them on camera, it is as if they are old and valued friends. Not only real-life journalists treat Murphy as an equal. Politicians from both parties show up on the program to talk with her and about her. If they all accept Murphy as a real-life counterpart, then who is the audience to deny her existence?

Faith Ford is Corky Sherwood, a former Miss America, the inexperienced cub reporter trying to earn her stripes. She admires Murphy and eventually wins her respect and the respect of her colleagues. Murphy gives the cub some advice: “Corky, if it will make you feel any better I tasted success at a pretty young age and I had some of the same fears you do. But then look at all I've experienced since then.” Corky answers, “You became an alcoholic. You had to dry out at Betty Ford. You had an illegitimate child. I'm looking at my future,” and the cub starts crying. When Sherwood plans to leave to go to CNN, Brown tells her, “Corky you're not going to be happy at CNN. Have you looked at those women behind the anchor desks. It's obvious that they have to do their own hair.”

In 1998, Murphy Brown is diagnosed with breast cancer and lives to talk about it. In the final program, Murphy plans to leave *F.Y.I* when she discovers a new lump in her breast. Murphy goes into surgery, makes her usual jokes, and then, under anesthesia, imagines that she finally gets an interview with God. After her ordeal, she decides that she wants to stay with “F.Y.I.” after threatening to quit: “In 20 years, I've done it all, I've seen it all.” Her co-anchor and best friend Dial agrees with her: “I'm wrestling with that decision myself...For years now, I've watched our business change. I've always held to a certain code, played by the rules. Well, there are no rules anymore. I can't find my niche. So if you're ready to move out, Slugger, I may be ready to move out too.” After much soul-searching, both decide to stay and continue the battle to do good journalism.

Megan Carter (Sally Field), a tenacious Miami Sentinel reporter in *Absence of Malice* (1982), is not the court of last resort for the falsely accused, but someone used by the government for its own ends. Paul Newman's Michael Gallagher makes the film's indictment of reporters' ethics and unscrupulous methods stick. He offers a moving, sympathetic portrayal of an innocent man powerless to fight authority as represented by the government and the press. Convicted in the press without being able to tell his side of the story, Newman's Gallagher is everything the old reporter as hero used to be: decent, caring, the underdog who does the best he can in a corrupt world and finally gets even in a spectacular way. In the old days, he would have been the victorious reporter beating all the odds.

Carter, supported by her old-fashioned editor McAdam (Josef Somner), tries to do a good job but falls into one ethical trap after another. She finds a Catholic woman who knows Gallagher is innocent because he helped her get an abortion. Under constant prodding by Carter, the woman reluctantly tells the reporter the story, but begs her not to print it. The Miami Sentinel publishes the story. In one of the most poignant scenes in movie history showing the power of the press and the individual's helplessness, the woman runs to each house picking up the newspaper in a hopeless attempt to stop people from seeing the story. When the editor tells Carter the woman has committed suicide, he says, "Let me take you home. It was not your fault." The shocked reporter looks at him with disgust: "Then why do I have to go home?"

Later, the editor and reporter talk about what they have done. McAdam tells her: "I know how to print what's true and I know how not to hurt people. I don't know how to do both at the same time and neither do you." Carter replies, "Maybe you're tougher than I am." Gallagher makes up a fake bribery story that Carter prints. She tells him, "Well, you got us all, didn't you, Michael?" He answers, "You got yourselves." She asks him, "How did you know I'd get the story?" He says, "I knew somebody would. I'm sorry it was you." "How did you know I'd print it," she asks. "It's news, isn't it?" he answers sarcastically. At the end of the film, a disillusioned Carter gives up her job and hopes to start over on a smaller newspaper.

Jane Craig (Holly Hunter) is the highly charged, obsessive TV news producer in *Broadcast News* (1987). The film turns familiar caricatures into flesh and blood people. Craig has a firm set of ethics rooted in her knowledge that she knows her stuff. When she argues with a network news president about giving an assignment to an inexperienced anchor, he says to her: "OK, that's your opinion. I don't agree." She says, "It's not opinion." The news president tells her, "You're just absolutely right and I'm absolutely wrong. It must be nice to always believe you know better, to always think you're the smartest person in the room." Her answer sums up a lifetime of hard news: "No, it's awful."

Craig becomes the first woman bureau chief in network history. When she tells an old newsman friend she is in love with the new reporter, he says he can't believe she could love someone who violates her code of ethics. He says the interview the reporter did when he had tears in his eyes was a fake: "Ask yourself how we were able to see that when he only had one camera and it was pointed at the girl during the entire interview." She looks at the tape outtakes and hears the field producer telling the reporter, "It kills me that we didn't get you on camera. It was so powerful seeing your reaction...For a second there I thought you were going to cry yourself. That would have been something." The reporter says, "Give me a minute," and then starts crying. Craig confronts the reporter: "It's terrible what you did." She realizes he doesn't understand that he did anything wrong: "It made me ill... You could get fired for things like that." He looks at her and says, "I got promoted for things like that." She tells him that working up tears for a news piece cutaway totally crossed the line. He tells her, "It's hard not to cross it. They keep moving the little sucker, don't they?"

Seven years later, Craig, unmarried, becomes the first woman managing editor for the national network news. For the audience, she sums up the conscientious TV journalist who works long

hours and who puts the news above everything else – even a personal life. The sob sister has come a long way since the 1930s.

### The Editor

Editors throughout the century were always gruff and sharp-tongued but usually understanding under their bluster. Most movie editors looked familiar because a handful of actors in the 1930s through the 1950s continually played the part. They were usually not leading men, but character actors who could get into the skin of a man whose whole concern was getting out a newspaper that would squash the competition.

There were editors-in-chief, managing editors and city editors, night editors and metro editors. When television came along, they were news producers and news directors. The editors-in-chief were sometimes indistinguishable from the publishers. They dressed better, seldom raised their voices, and left the dirty work to the managing editor or city editor. In most films, the managing editor and the city editor looked and sounded alike. If they weren't the stars of the film, they seldom left their desks. They screamed out orders at cubs and veterans alike, smoked cigars any chance they could, and regularly fired their star reporter who always came back for more. They decided what stories to run and when to run them. When a reporter raced into the city room screaming, "Stop the presses!" it was the city editor who decided if the story was worth the bother.

Sam Bradshaw (Paul Muni), the rebellious managing editor of the Times-Star in *Hi Nellie!* (1934), finds himself demoted to advice-to-the-lovelorn columnist when he refuses to run a story crucifying an innocent man. A loophole in his contract makes it impossible for the publisher to fire him, so the editor becomes Nellie Nelson. The new "Nellie's" column becomes so popular that the publisher won't let Bradshaw out of the heartthrob's job, but the editor captures a killer in true movie newspaper fashion and regains his old position before the film ends. "Hi Nellie!" was so successful, it was copied over and over.

In one scene, Bradshaw asks a cub reporter why he didn't write what happened at a Polish picnic. The reporter explains the picnic didn't take place because the boat carrying children to the picnic sank. The editor looks at the cub and says: "I see. No picnic. No story. The lives of 600 children in danger, but no picnic." He asks if the cub has had his supper yet: "Get yourself a cup of coffee, some fried potatoes and a big plate of scrambled eggs and brains...When you eat that you'll have more brains in your belly than you do in your head." After the chastised reporter leaves, the editor orders his assistant to rewrite that picnic yarn into a feature and to fire the reporter immediately.

Hutcheson (Humphrey Bogart) is the crusading managing editor of *The Day* in *Deadline U.S.A.* (1952). The film was made when television news was on the rise and newspaper readership began its steady decline. At a wake for their newspaper that is about to be sold, one reporter recalls a question he was asked when he applied to *The Day*: Are you a journalist or a reporter? "What's the difference?" I said. 'A journalist makes himself the hero of the story. A reporter is only the witness.'" Later, a journalism student comes up to Hutcheson telling him he wants to be

a reporter. The editor tells him, “So you want to be a reporter? Here’s some advice about this racket. Don’t ever change your mind. It may not be the oldest profession, but it’s the best.”

Hutcheson is a hero, but he’s not above stooping to unethical behavior. When he finds out his former wife is engaged to be married, he uses the power of the press to have his research department check out her fiancé. He doesn’t like what he hears because there’s no real dirt to be found: “That’s a rotten report,” he tells the researcher.

In court, Hutcheson speaks for journalists everywhere when the judge asks him why the newspaper shouldn’t be sold to a rival paper by the late owner’s relatives and then killed. He says that *The Day* consists of a big building, teletypes, presses, typewriters, newsprint, ink and desks. “But this newspaper is more than that,” he tells the court. “*The Day* is more than a building. It’s people. It’s 1,500 men and women whose skill, hearts, brains and experience make a great newspaper possible. We don’t own one stick of furniture in this company, but we along with the 290,000 people who read this paper have a vital interest in whether it lives or dies.” Hutcheson argues that the death of a newspaper sometimes has far-reaching effects. “It concerns the public every day. The newspaper...is published first, last and always in the public interest. An honest, fearless press is the public’s first protection against gangsterism, local or international.” Hutcheson is interrupted repeatedly by the opposition lawyers until the sympathetic judge says, “As one of your 290,000 readers, Mr. Hutcheson, I rule that you may proceed with your statement.” Hutcheson goes on: “A newspaper is a very personal matter, Sir. Ask the people who let us in their homes.” The editor says he doesn’t care if the rival paper’s owner runs two papers or 20 papers or 100 papers, since some of the best newspapers are run by a chain. “But I do care when he buys a newspaper to put it out of business because without competition, there can be no freedom of the press. And I’m talking about free enterprise, Your Honor. The right of the public to a marketplace of ideas, news and opinions, not of one man or one leader or even one government.” The paper is lost, but not before Hutcheson and his staff expose a gangster-murderer in banner headlines across the front page.

Sam Gatlin (Jack Webb) is the tough-talking night editor of the *Los Angeles Examiner* in -30- (1959). -30- is what newspaper reporters traditionally type at the end of their stories. Gatlin works from 3 p.m. to midnight and his decisions determine what the big-city paper will publish. Gatlin tells a young cub that she’s going to lose a paragraph in her first byline story and when she complains, he tells her: “On this newspaper, when you lose only one paragraph, that’s all the same as getting a bronze star. You came up with a good angle here and you seem to know your way around a typewriter. Well, Sis, you asked for a chance and you picked the right night.”

The tough city editor, Jim Bathgate (William Conrad), has a heart of gold. He takes time out to tell the copy boys – and the audience – what a newspaper is all about: “We have to print on the cheapest paper they can make, otherwise we can’t sell it for a dime. Do you know what people use these for? They roll them up and they swat their puppies for wetting on the rug. They spread them on the wall when they’re painting the walls, they wrap fish in them, they 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” – and here he carefully opens the paper and holds it reverently in both hands – “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 these things 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. Yeah. It's a newspaper, that's all...and it only costs 10 cents, that's all. But if you only read the comics section or the want ads, it's still the best buy for your money in the world."

Lou Grant (Ed Asner), the tough, hard-boiled, hard-drinking news director featured in *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, bore more than a passing resemblance to the old-fashioned movie newspaper editor. Fittingly, he moves to Los Angeles and returns to the newspaper business, becoming city editor of The Los Angeles Tribune. The hour-long *Lou Grant*, one of the finest dramatic series about journalism ever seen on television, aired from 1977 to 1982. Some 20 to 25 million people watched *Lou Grant* every week – dwarfing the audience of the largest newspapers in the country.

*Lou Grant* updated the newspaper journalist's image using the intimacy of the new medium, an intimacy that the big movie screen rarely achieved. The exchanges between editors and reporters seemed real. Grant takes the egotistical reporter Joe Rossi (Robert Walden) aside in one episode to explain what good reporting requires. Rossi tells Grant: "In addition to being a reporter, I also happen to be a student of political history. I know all about how these guys operate." A sneering Grant sarcastically responds: "Well, that's great Rossi. Yeah. Most of these poor, miserable fools, sometimes they don't even know what they're going to write until after they've done the legwork, but after all they're mere reporters. They're not students of political history like you. That gives you a tremendous advantage. Did you know that? I mean you have this story already written and the only place you have been is the men's room." Rossi says: "I don't have to do legwork if what I'm doing is a think piece." Grant: "Ah, now we have it," (Grant slaps Rossi on the back several times) "a think piece. You just want to sit down and do some writing, don't you Rossi? You don't want to report. You just want to show us how many words you know." Yet Grant respects the reporter: "Now take Rossi. There's someone who doesn't care at all about other people's feelings. He's arrogant, pushy, abrasive, obnoxious, uncaring, insensitive. That's what makes him a good reporter."

When a female reporter tells Grant, "You're afraid I'm going to try to make this into a sob story," he tells her: "Afraid? I'm afraid you won't. I love a good sob story. I remember when we used to have these women reporters who wore the big hats. They'd come back to the office after covering a story and without taking off their long white gloves, they rapped out 5,000 words that would wrench your guts out. They were great, those sob sisters." The female reporter says, "Well, I won't go with the wardrobe, but if you'll just go with me on this one, I might...." Grant: "You might wrench my guts out?." "Right," says the reporter.

The 114 hour-long episodes over five seasons showed journalism as process, not conspiracy. The image of the journalist splintered into a whole variety of images of journalists that often conflict over what is right and what is wrong. The popular series ended abruptly. The network said "Lou Grant" was canceled because of declining ratings. But many felt CBS pulled the plug on "Lou Grant" because actor Ed Asner had become too involved in controversial condemnations of U.S. involvement in Central America. The program's images of the journalist, however, remain in reruns and in the public memory.



In *The Paper* (1994), Alicia Clark (Glenn Close), the feisty managing editor of the New York Sun, the sixth largest paper in the country, worries about cutting costs and upping her pay. She tells the editor she has other offers. The editor says he knows she loved running the features department and that the publisher shoved her into being managing editor. She agrees: “I never knew how isolating it was going to be. I mean, there’s not exactly a lot of laughs around my office these days.” The editor understands but is not sympathetic: “Well, you’re in management now. If everybody loved you, you’d be doing something wrong....”

Clark jumps on a story about two black kids who are accused of killing a white man. The headline “Caught” bores her. She says, “How about something like ‘Gottcha.’ Everyone loves it. ‘‘Gottcha’ with a slammer.’’ The female foreign editor says, “Oh yeah. God forbid this paper ever runs anything without an exclamation mark.” Henry Hackett (Michael Keaton), the metro editor, believes the two teenagers are being framed. Clark wants to go with the headline: “We taint them today. We make them look good on Saturday. Everybody’s happy.” Hackett says the story could permanently alter the public’s perception of two teenagers who might be innocent. The editor gives the metro editor until deadline to learn the truth. He and his star columnist get a policeman to admit the two teenagers are innocent, but when Hackett returns to the pressroom he sees papers coming off the press with the “Gottcha” headline. He tries to stop the presses. Clark arrives and sees Hackett’s new headline, “They Didn’t Do It.”

Clark screams: “You son-of-a-bitch. You’re not going to stop this run.” Hackett asks her about “Gottcha:” “Did you run that? Did you run that headline?” Clark: “You’re goddamn right I did. I got a desperate call at 9:30 saying we’re two hours past our deadline and nobody knew where the hell you were.” Hackett: “It’s wrong. It’s a 180 degrees wrong. We’ve got to change it.” Clark listens and asks a key question: “How far are we into the run?” Chuck tells her, “Quarter of a way, maybe more. There’s 90,000 papers on the truck already.” Clark is adamant: “Oh, no way. No way. We run what we’ve got.” Hackett says it’s wrong. Clark says, “Given the information we had at the time, the story’s right.” Hackett says, “But it’s not right. I’ve got a cop. I’ve got a quote. It’s wrong.” Clark: “Not for today, it’s not. Tomorrow it’s wrong. We only have to be right for a day.” Hackett argues this shouldn’t be about semantics: “This shouldn’t be money. People will read this, Alicia, and they’ll believe us.” Clark: “We’re the Sun. They’ll take us with a grain of salt. We’ll run yours tomorrow.” Hackett is beside himself: “No. No. Not tomorrow. Right fucking now. Today.”

Clark now gets personal: “I bet you thought I didn’t even know the shit you guys say about me... You thought I didn’t get the bean-counter jokes? You think I don’t understand your snide shit. You don’t even have a college degree. You couldn’t take the shit I put up with, Henry... (Hackett tries to stop her, but she’s on a roll)... You assholes think I don’t know that you wait until I leave before you sneak off to the Bear’s Head. Can’t even invite me for a lousy drink.” The two start a fight over the keys to the presses. Hackett finally knocks her down, bloodies her nose, and stops the presses. She fires him and orders the press run to continue.

The paper’s star columnist walks with Clark to the local bar and tries to appeal to her conscience: “You want me to say you struck a blow for journalistic integrity today. Can’t do it. You abused your position to settle a personal score. This is what it is. Live with it.” Clark calls the pressroom to stop the presses and change the headline when a disgruntled reader, trying to shoot

the columnist, shoots her in the leg instead. She's taken to the hospital and refuses to sign a consent form until she can call the pressroom. The next day in bed, Clark is reading the New York Sun with the headline: "They Didn't Do It." When a nurse tries to read the paper as well and asks her, "Can I read that when you're done?" The smiling Clark looks at her and says, "Buy your own."

## THE SCOUNDRELS

### The Media Owner

Those who own the media in films and TV programs – whether publishers of newspapers or owners of broadcasting and new media – have often tried to use the media for their own ends. Early movies showed newspaper publishers as benevolent journalists who tried to offer a good product at a fair price. But the movies soon discovered that they needed a villain. Reporters and editors were too busy trying to capture the crook or expose corruption, so amoral and affluent publishers and, later, media moguls crowded the conscientious publishers off the screen. Money-mad or power-hungry, the publishers in movies ignored the press' duty to the public.

William Randolph Hearst, probably the most familiar real-life publisher in American history, changed journalism with his sensational coverage of crime, sex, and disasters, his attacks on the rich, his phony lawsuits against big corporations, and his screaming patriotism along with puzzles, comics, contests and medical quackery. Hollywood's version of Hearst, Charles Foster Kane (Orson Welles) is the bigger-than-life publisher in *Citizen Kane*, (1941). Arguably one of the greatest American films ever made, *Citizen Kane* portrays an egomaniacal newspaper tycoon featured in dozens of lesser films. Yet, the film offers a more balanced portrait of a publisher who pursues principle as well as power. For example, Kane and his friends creating the first copy of *The Inquirer* is the finest tribute to the bustling work and evergreen hopes of journalism ever put on the screen. They have the glee and sass of youthful, inspired amateurism. Kane wants to know why a story about a woman missing in Brooklyn in a rival paper isn't in his *Inquirer*. The editor of the *Inquirer* says, "Because we're running a newspaper, Mr. Kane, not a scandal sheet." Kane responds: "Look, Mr. Carter, here is a three-column headline in the *Chronicle*. Why hasn't the *Inquirer* a three-column headline?" The editor answers, "The news wasn't big enough." Kane tells him, "Mr. Carter, if the headline is big enough, it makes the news big enough." Kane says to his colleagues, "I've got to make the New York *Inquirer* as important to New York as the gas in that light." He creates a "Declaration of Principles" saying that he will "provide the people of this city with a daily paper that will tell all the news honestly. I will also provide them..." His best friend and conscience, Jed Leland (Joseph Cotton), interrupts him: "That's the second sentence you've started with 'I.' Kane answers: "People are going to know who's responsible, and they're going to get the truth in the *Inquirer* quickly and simply and entertainingly and no special interests are going to be allowed to interfere with that truth." He picks up the paper and adds, "I will also provide them with a fighting and tireless champion of their rights as citizens and as human beings." Kane decides to run his principles in a box on the front page.

One of Hearst's favorite tactics was to hire away reporters he didn't want at double or triple the price, then fire them. Walter Burns in *The Front Page* does the same thing to a reporter and Charles Foster Kane raids an opposing paper's staff in one of the most amusing sequences in the film. Kane loses everything when he tries to use the press for personal gain trying, like Hearst, to win political office. "Citizen Kane" offers an unforgettable look at the power of the press and shows us a publisher who does what he wants when he wants to. No war in Cuba? He'll manufacture one. He'll do anything to get what he wants, and his arrogance and misuse of the press for personal gain finally destroys him.

A more villainous publisher is D.B. Norton (Edward Arnold) in *Meet John Doe* (1941), a Frank Capra film that brings the media baron's repressed goals of power and persuasion into the open. Norton is both a disreputable businessman and a full-fledged American fascist. When his plans for political domination are in jeopardy, Norton ruthlessly destroys the popular John Doe movement he created and then corrupted. He tells the man impersonating John Doe the facts of life: "Why, with the newspapers and the radio stations that these gentlemen control, we can kill the John Doe movement deader than a doornail, and we'll do it, too, the moment you step out of line!"

Norton and his cohorts control almost every important communications medium in the country and those media serve as Norton's prime means of controlling the American people. Radio and newspapers exert an almost supernatural influence in "Meet John Doe." They are the reason for John Doe's climb to prominence and his fall from grace. The possible monopolization and manipulation of the media by unscrupulous politicians and power brokers was a legitimate fear in the 1940s. It has continued to be so generation after generation.

In 1976, the same year that *All the President's Men* made journalists movie heroes again, another film, *Network*, created a new kind of villain popular today – the amoral network executive who prizes ratings and profits above everything else. *Network* showed what would happen if newscasts continued to present the day's events as circus. Network bosses discover that the psychotic behavior of veteran anchorman Howard Beale (Peter Finch) results in higher ratings. They develop a news program that at the time bore little relationship to any network news, but offered a bizarre extension of what was happening in local news around the country.

Program Chief Diana Christensen (Faye Dunaway) convinces her boss, Frank Hackett (Robert Duvall) to put on Beale, the aging anchor who yelled "bullshit" on the air. Christensen says, "I think we've lucked in on something." Hackett is shocked: "Oh, for God's sake, Diane. Are you suggesting we put that lunatic back on the air yelling, 'Bullshit?'" Christensen doesn't miss a beat: "Yes, I think we should put Beale back on the air tonight and keep him on. Did you see the News this morning? Did you see the Times? We got press coverage on this you can't buy for a million dollars. Frank, that dumb show jumped five rating points in one night. Tonight's show has got to be at least 15. We've just increased our audience by 20 to 30 million people in one night. Now, you're not going to get something like this dumped in your lap for the rest of your days. And you can't just piss it away. Howard Beale went out there last night and said what every American feels. That he's tired of all the bullshit. He's articulating a popular rage. I want that show, Frank. I can turn that show into the biggest smash on television." Frank looks at her and says: "What do you mean you want that show? It's a news show. It's not your department."

Christensen persuades Hackett to give her the program and put on Beale Monday through Friday. “One show like that can pull this whole network out of the hole. Now, Frank, it’s been handed to us on a plate. Let’s not blow it.” UBS network news president Max Schumacher (William Holden) objects. As one of his news colleagues puts it: “We’re running a news department down here not a circus and Howard Beale’s not a bearded lady and if you think I’m going to go along with the bastardization of the news, you can have my resignation right now.” But Beale protests. He wants to do it.

Beale scores high with the public shouting an improvised mantra, “I’m mad as hell and I’m not going to take it anymore.” He becomes a ratings sensation and makes millions for the network. It’s the journalist who goes berserk in a crazy world where news is more show biz than information. Program czar Christensen, flush with success, fires the network news president Schumacher after taking him to bed, and takes over his job. When Beale decides to offer more serious commentary, the ratings drop. The top corporate boss refuses to fire him, so Christensen persuades Hackett to assassinate the journalist on camera. As the narrator says ending the film: “This was the story of Howard Beale, the first known instance of a man who was killed because he had lousy ratings.”

Elliot Carver (Jonathan Pryce) is a multi-billionaire media mogul who heads the Carver Media Group Network (CMGN) and wants to control the world through an exclusive worldwide flow of information in *Tomorrow Never Dies* (1997). The publisher-media tycoon is no longer content to take over a country. Now media control of the world is at stake and no price is too high to pay to get it.

Carver’s favorite words are “delicious,” “excellent” and “outstanding.” One reason he reports the news before his competitors is that he creates it. He dictates the headlines for his “Tomorrow” newspaper’s “Late Edition” while the event is taking place: British Sailors Murdered. “I’m having fun with my headlines,” he tells his chief thug, who is murdering British sailors in the South China Sea. “I need to know the exact number of survivors.” His henchmen shoot the survivors while a cameraman records the murders on videotape for CMGN Television. As his voice rises, he tells his worldwide staff: “I want us on the air 24 hours a day. This is our moment! And a billion people around this planet will watch it, hear it and read about it from the Carver Media Group. There’s no news like bad news.”

When secret agent James Bond says to Carver that he has become the new Supreme Allied Commander, Carver is pleased: “Exactly. Caesar had his legions. Napoleon had his armies. I have my divisions. TV. News. Magazines. And by midnight tonight, I will have reached and influenced more people than anyone in the history of this planet save God himself.” Carver pauses, then mutters: “And the best he ever managed was the Sermon on the Mount.” Bond tells him: “You really are quiet insane.” Carver: “The distance between insanity and genius is measured only by success.” Carver yells at Bond: “Great men have always manipulated the media to save the world. Look at William Randolph Hearst who told his photographers, ‘You provide the pictures, I’ll provide the war.’ I’ve just taken it one step further.”

Carver plans to escape in a news helicopter covering the event when Bond tells him, “I may have some breaking news for you, Elliot.” As Bond hits him, the secret agent says, “You forgot the

first rule of mass media, Elliot. Give the people what they want.” And with that he throws the screaming Carver into a giant circular saw.

### **The Scandalmonger**

Movies and TV programs depicting the journalist as a scoundrel showed the worst face of journalism, the kind of journalism people talk about when they say the news media are corrupt and should be banned from interfering in people’s lives. *Five Star Final* (1931), one of the first talking pictures to vigorously condemn the yellow press of the day, was based on a Broadway play by Louis Weitzenkorn who had worked for the New York Evening Graphic. The film was an expose of a New York tabloid and the ruthless way it exploited innocent people to build circulation.

Randall (Edward G. Robinson) is the tough, hard-bitten managing editor of the New York Evening Gazette with a streak of humanity who is constantly washing his hands in a symbolic gesture to get rid of the tabloid filth he creates. He is reproached for not running more sensational stories to boost circulation. When circulation slides, Randall is ordered by the publisher Hincecliffe (Oscar Apfel), referred to as “The Sultan of Slop,” to publish juicier stories. He resuscitates a long- forgotten 20-year-old murder case under the lurid title “The Love-Mad Stenographer.”

One of the paper’s reporters, Isopod (Boris Karloff) is an unusually repulsive character who pretends to be a minister to get the story. When Randall asks his staff to find a picture of the accused woman showing her in prison, they tell him no such picture exists. He says to take her picture and “paint bars on it.” The woman, now respectable, can’t stand the shame and poisons herself. When her husband discovers the body, he also kills himself. The Gazette reporter and photographer climb up a fire escape and sneak into the apartment to get a picture of the bodies.

When he finds out what happens, the distraught managing editor resigns shouting, “We’re nothing but a pack of backstabbing murderers...I’m through with your dirty rag and I’m through with you. Oh, I’m not ducking any of the blame for this thing. You thought up the murder and I committed it. But I did it for smaller profit, for wages. You did it for circulation.” Hincecliffe cries out, “You must be mad!” Randall goes on: “Mad! Yes, I am. All my life I’ll be mad” because he says that all of his life he’ll be seeing the woman’s daughter “standing there and asking me why I killed her mother. And I want you, Hincecliffe, to enjoy that picture with me. I want you to wake up in the night and see your own squashy, putrid, little soul. I want you to know that every human being that works for you and does your work because we’re afraid to starve knows what a diseased hypocrite you are. We all know what you are, but we take your money.”

Later, as Randall is about to leave his office, he takes his last call from the newsroom about a new love nest killing and, laughing bitterly, he tells his colleagues that they can plaster the story all over the front page: “Get an Extra out if you want to. Say, paint it on the front of the building. Tattoo it on Hincecliffe’s chest. I don’t care what you do with it because I’m not working here any more. No, Hincecliffe has to get himself a new head butcher. I’ve had 10 years of filth and

blood. I'm splashed with it, drenched with it. I've had all I can stand. Plenty of it. Take your love nest killing to Hinchcliffe with my compliments and tell him to shove it up his...." Randall throws the phone through the publisher's glass door and the noise blots out his last profane word. The final shot of the tabloid in the gutter sums up the movie's bitter indictment of the tabloid press of the late 1920s.

Among the most popular villains in newspaper movies are the power-hungry gossip columnists, who will stop at nothing to get that must-read item into the paper. They are cocky, power-mad, ready to sacrifice everyone to get ahead and stay on top. Yet, they are played by such likable and ingratiating actors that their evil is muted. You like them in spite of what they do and how they act. By the end of the film, they usually redeem themselves a bit by acting human and doing the right thing.

Most were modeled on Walter Winchell, the Broadway gossip columnist, and Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper, the Hollywood gossip columnists, who achieved enormous power from the 1930s through the 1950s. In *The Sweet Smell of Success* (1957), J.J. Hunsecker (Burt Lancaster) is a power-mad, hateful Broadway columnist ("The Eyes of Broadway") who, like Winchell, can make or break anyone. The columnist creates reputations or destroys lives at will. He hates press agents, but uses them unmercifully. Every night, J.J. Hunsecker can be found entertaining guests at one of his regular New York nightclub tables. Someone criticizing him is criticizing his readers and that, according to Hunsecker, is the ultimate sin. As he tells one of his toadies: "You think this is a person thing with me? Are you telling me I think of this in terms of personal pique? Don't you see that today that boy wiped his feet on the choice, on the predilections of 60 million men and women in the greatest country in the world. If you had any morals yourself, you'd understand the immorality of that boy's stand. It wasn't me he criticized. It was my readers." Lancaster, in a cool, restrained performance personifying evil, with steely eyes glaring out from behind his glasses, makes the megalomaniac columnist real and terrifying. The image of the journalist as the protector of the public took a rough ride in this portrayal of a brutal columnist who destroys innocent victims

No film ever painted a more brutal portrait of a reporter than director Billy Wilder's *Ace in the Hole* (1951), also known as *The Big Carnival*. Chuck Tatum (Kirk Douglas), a has-been reporter consumed by his own ambition, uses a tragedy to try to return to big-time journalism. Having lied, cheated and drunk his way from one metropolitan paper to the next, he fast-talks Jacob Q. Boot (Porter Hall), the editor-publisher of the Albuquerque Sun-Bulletin into hiring him. Tatum says he has been fired from 11 papers with a total circulation of 7 million readers: "I'm a \$250 a week newspaperman. I can be had for \$50." The editor wants to know, "Why are you so good to me?" Tatum just keeps talking: "I know newspapers backwards, forwards and sideways. I can write them, edit them, print them, wrap them and sell them. I can handle big news and little news and if there's no news I'll go out and bite a dog."

When a man is trapped in an abandoned mine shaft in New Mexico, Tatum promotes and prolongs the event to keep the story on the front pages of every newspaper in America. The film not only indicts the despicable and ruthless reporter, but also the mob curiosity, greed and hysteria that follow the event. The point is that, yes, the reporter acts reprehensibly, but the crowd's morbid curiosity creates the market in which stories like this can flourish. Tatum tells

the cub reporter that one man trapped is the best story of all: “Human interest. You pick up the paper you read about 84 men or 284 or a million men like in the Chinese famine. You read it but it doesn’t stay with you. One man’s different. You want to know all about him. That’s human interest. Say, what did you take in that School of Journalism? Advertising?”

Tatum is devastated when he realizes he has literally killed the ending he needs for a successful story when the trapped man dies before being rescued. Wounded by an irate lover, Tatum goes to the newspaper office and tells the publisher, “How would you like to make yourself a thousand dollars a day...I’m a thousand-dollar-a-day newspaperman. You can have me for nothing.” Tatum then falls down and, in true movie tradition, dies. Villainy does not go unpunished in 1950s’ movies.

Nearly 50 years later, *Mad City* (1997) turned the *Ace in the Hole* reporter into a broadcast journalist who survives physically, but dies emotionally and spiritually. Max Brackett (Dustin Hoffman) is at a museum when a security guard who was fired takes hostage a group of children, their teacher and a museum official. Brackett becomes the security guard’s spokesperson and adviser, milking the story and persuading the authorities to let him call the shots. When a female intern stops to help a wounded guard instead of shooting the camera, Brackett yells at her: “By not having your camera, we lost footage that nobody else would have had. You see, you have to make a decision whether you are going to be part of the story or whether you’re going to be there to record the story.”

A network anchor, Kevin Hollander (Alan Alda), hates Brackett because during live coverage of an airline crash, Brackett ridiculed him on a live national broadcast. The callous Hollander kept asking questions about body parts and mutilations until field reporter Brackett cracked. Through tears, Brackett ridiculed the tasteless questions Hollander was asking, finally shouting at the anchor that if he wanted a body part, “an arm or a leg because you can have your pick.” Hollander never forgave him for embarrassing him on national television. But the network now wants Brackett’s exclusive story. Brackett can get his own network newsmagazine if he sets up a one-on-one interview with the security guard for Hollander (“I’m the man America trusts with news”).

When Brackett decides to ignore Hollander and take the interview to CNN’s real-life Larry King instead, the vindictive anchor gets his revenge by doing a bitter expose on Brackett. Hollander shows on national television how Brackett manipulated the story, becoming the security guard’s adviser and confidant, risking lives in the process. After the security guard releases the hostages, locks himself in the museum and blows up the building, a stunned Brackett is surrounded by the media shouting questions at him. He holds up his hand to shield his eyes from the lights and the questions repeatedly crying out, “You don’t understand. We killed him. We killed him.” But none of the media listens as the mass of reporters, microphones and cameras crush in on the bewildered reporter, giving him a bitter taste of his own medicine.

### The Anonymous Journalist

By the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the journalists most people remembered were anonymous, played by nondescript actors, who chase after a story by rudely invading people's privacy. Reporters become bit players, part of an intrusive pack of harassing journalists, many armed with lights, cameras and microphones. The public watched uncomfortably as these obnoxious reporters filled the movie and, especially, the TV screens. They poke their cameras into people's faces, yell out questions, recklessly pursue popular actors – the kind who used to play journalists once cheered by audiences.

There were always such packs of print journalists chasing after heroes in movies, but their zeal was usually taken in good spirits. They were given witty lines to say and they asked questions the audiences wanted answered. They were often used to advance the plot and summarize the action. In *King Kong* (1933), anonymous reporters and photographers frightened the great ape into breaking his bonds and wrecking havoc on New York City before he was killed. Many in the audience blamed the journalists for the giant ape's unhappy demise.

Today these packs of journalists appear more menacing and out-of-control because of the lights, cameras, microphones and tape recorders they jab into faces of real people on TV news and of favorite actors in movies and TV entertainment programs.

Anonymous reporters chase after or harass such stars as Doris Day (*It Happens to Jane* (1959), Goldie Hawn (*Protocol*, 1984), Denzel Washington (*Ricochet*, 1991) and Julia Roberts (*Notting Hill*, 1999). Television series and movies-made-for-television often include an arbitrary pack of journalists chasing after the prime-time actor. *Hunter* (1984) and *Miami Vice* (1988) offer particularly vicious portraits of these anonymous reporters in action. The continual bombardment of obnoxious reporters chasing popular actors contributes to the public's rejection of the reporter as hero as someone necessary to society.

The archetypal anonymous reporter is a minor character in the major action films, *Die Hard* (1988) and *Die Hard II* (1990). In the original, Richard Thornberg (William Atherton), a TV news reporter for KFLW-TV, Channel 14, epitomizes the insufferable journalist. When he wants a truck for a remote broadcast, he wants it now and threatens to steal one if he doesn't get it immediately. After an explosion, he says to the cameraman: "My God, tell me you got that." "I got it. I got it," yells the cameraman. "Eat your heart out, Channel 5."

Reporter Thornberg finds out where the hero and his captured wife live. He threatens the Latina housekeeper with the Immigration Service to get into the house so he can interview their children. Thornberg's broadcast tells the terrorists something they do not know: that they are holding the hero's wife, which puts her into immediate jeopardy and compromises the hero's position. When the hero and his wife escape, the TV reporter goes up to them and says, "Now that it's all over, after this incredible ordeal, what are your feelings?" The woman hits him in the nose: "Merry Christmas." The stunned reporter turns to his cameraman and says, "Did you get that?" When the hero's wife belts the reporter in the face, the audience cheers wildly.

In the sequel, Thornberg again puts the story ahead of any human concerns. As that film ends, he is seen on the ground whimpering: "Somebody, help me, please. Oh, help me, please." An old



woman recognizes him, shouts “asshole,” and proceeds to kick him over and over again. Reporter Richard Thornberg – the reporter audiences love to loathe.

No matter how much they ridiculed the anonymous reporters who appeared in their movies, the early movie writers, mostly former newspaper people, had an affection for journalists. Even the bitterest portrait of a reporter was tempered by a sincere liking for the breed. These journalists were just doing their job – not a nice job, perhaps, but an important job nevertheless. In today’s films and TV movies, the image of the reporter is being created, for the most part, by writers, directors, producers and actors who care little for the intrusive journalist. They have been chased by enough reporters, for valid and for silly reasons, to find it acceptable, even desirable, to include a scene showing an irresponsible pack of abusive, anonymous reporters.

### A Final Note

The most consistent heroic image of the journalist from 1938 to 2001 and beyond involves Clark Kent and the rest of the staff of the Daily Planet. The story contains many of the fundamental reporter-as-hero clichés: The crusading newsman always looking out for the public good. The feisty sob sister, the equal of any male reporter. Rival reporters with an I’ll-do-anything-for-a-story mentality. The hard-boiled, get-the-story-at-any-cost editor. The cub photographer-reporter, always messing up, but finally proving himself. The Daily Planet staff made its first appearance in June 1938 in Action Comics and quickly became a hit on radio, in 17 theatrical animated cartoons (1941-43), two 15-chapter movie serials (1948, 1950), the television program, *The Adventures of Superman*, (1953), four movies (1978 to 1987), another television series, *Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* (1993), several television cartoon series (1996 to 2001), and *Smallville* (2001), Clark Kent, the early years.

Throughout the 60-plus year history, the characters seldom change their I’ll-do-anything-for-a-story mentality. In *Superman: The Movie* (1978), when reporter Lois Lane is asked how she gets all the great stories, she and editor Perry White answer in unison, “A good reporter doesn’t get great stories. A good reporter makes them great.” White tells Lane that Clark Kent “may seem like just a mild-mannered reporter, but listen, not only does he know how to treat his editor-in-chief with the proper respect, not only does he have a snappy, punchy prose style, but he is, in my 40 years in this business, the fastest typist I’ve ever seen.”

When Superman first rescues Lane, White screams at his staff that he wants the story: “We’re sitting on top of the story of the century here. I want the name of this flying whachamacallit to go with the Daily Plant like bacon and eggs, franks and beans, death and taxes, politics and corruption.” Kent says, “I don’t think that he would lend himself to any cheap promotion schemes though, Mr. White.” The editor barks, “Exactly how would you know that, Kent?” “Er...Just...er... a first impression,” Kent timidly answers. “Well, anyway, who’s talking cheap?” says White. “I’ll make him a partner if I have to. Right?” His secretary yells out, “Right Chief.” White goes on: “I want the real story. I want the inside dope on this guy.” He then yells at his reporters one question after another: Has he got a family? Where does he live? How does he fly? Who is he? What’s his name? What’s he’s got hidden under that cape of his? Batteries?

Why did he show up last night? Where does he come from? Does he have a girlfriend? What's his favorite ball team? “Now listen to me. I tell you boys and girls, whichever one of you gets it out of him is going to wind up with the single most important interview since God talked to Moses.” White’s cigar is lit for him: “What are you standing around for? Move. Get on that story.”

In *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace* (1987), the Daily Planet and all the good journalism it stands for is in jeopardy. David Warfield (Sam Wanamaker), a Rupert Murdoch-type media mogul who owns “all those sleazy tabloids,” buys the Daily Planet. He tells an angry White that he only reads the ledger. “I bought the paper out from under them. The Daily Planet hasn’t made any money in three years.” “And the name of the game is making money,” says his daughter, Lacy Warfield (Muriel Hemingway) whom he names as co-editor with the Daily Planet editor. A furious White says, “If you think I’m going to let you turn this grand old lady into one of your bimbos....” Kent tells Warfield his opinion: “I think I speak for all of us. We’ll do our best to cooperate...but a reporter’s first allegiance has to be to the truth. The people in this city depend on us and we can’t let them down.”

The 1993 TV series, *Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman*, emphasized the human reporter (Dean Cain) from Smallville instead of the superhero. Lane tells Kent in the first episode: “Let’s get something straight. I did not work my buns off to become an investigative reporter for the Daily Planet just to baby-sit some hack from nowheresville. And one other thing, you’re not working with me, you’re working for me. I call the shots, I ask the questions. You are low man. I am top banana, and that’s the way I like it. Comprendre?” White pairs the two, calling them the Woodward and Bernstein of the Daily Planet. “You and Kent,” shouts White. “The experience of the battle-scarred veteran paired with the hunger of the exciting fresh talent.” Lane responds, “I’m not that scarred. and he’s not that exciting.”

Even though the TV series is set in the 1990s, reporters Kent and Lane act as if they’re in an old-fashioned newspaper film. They do anything to get the story including breaking into offices to get information. Lois Lane and Clark Kent are no different from the rival reporters who appeared in one movie after another in the 1930s and 1940s. They each try to be the best reporter on the paper, they argue, they eventually kiss and fall in love. Lois and Clark even marry: “Our byline is going to look great on a Pulitzer some day,” Lane says to Kent. “Yeah, but whose name is going to go first?” he asks. “Mine, of course,” she says and they smile.

Look at the website where the story comes from. Does it look real? Is the text well written? Many fake news stories use images that are Photoshopped or taken from an unrelated site. Sometimes, if you just look closely at an image, you can see if it has been changed. Or use a tool like Google Reverse Image search. It will show you if the same image has been used in other contexts. 3. Check the story is in other places. Look to see if the story you are reading is on other news sites that you know and trust. If you do find it on many other sites, then it probably isn't fake (although there are some exceptions), as many big news organisations try to check their sources before they publish. Once again, Hollywood has captured the imagination of the world with the release of the latest Star Wars film, following on the success of The Martian in the summer. One is pure fantasy, the other science-based, but both can inspire young people and scientists to reach higher. Social Sharing. Pure fantasy can still inspire young people and scientists to reach higher. Bob McDonald

Â· CBC News Â· Posted: Dec 18, 2015 12:17 PM ET | Last Updated: December 18, 2015. Films like Star Wars may be fantasy, but they help us stretch our imaginations and can trigger the pursuit of real-world advances in tec