

# MOVIECHOPSHOP

## Because Quaid Asked: Five Nifty Journalism Movies of the Last 10 Years

Posted on 21 April 2009 by ShepRamsey

Hello all! This past weekend I saw a nifty little picture by the name of *State of Play* about a journalist played by Russell Crowe searching for the truth regarding the mysterious death of an aide to Congressman Ben Affleck. I was excited to see the film given its pedigree (directed by *The Last King of Scotland*'s Kevin MacDonal and co-written by Tony Gilroy and Billy Ray), and it's a good thriller, if not totally perfect and a little rocky at the end.

As much as I did really dig the film, I think my MovieChopShop colleague Quaid liked it better than I did. In his [recent review](#), he pondered the question, "When was the last time we had a really good movie about journalism?" Well, my dear Quaid, we've had quite a few in recent years, and I'd be honored to devote a bit of my time and attention to pointing out a few journalistic gems of late.

### 5. *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy* (2004)

Okay, so I'm starting out small. Really small. And yeah, journalism kinda has nothing to do with what this movie is all about. It's merely a backdrop for a lot of off-the-wall bizarre



and crass jokes and peculiar behavior from people we're pretty sure are adults, but sometimes we wonder. I do, however, believe that there's something journalistically intriguing about this film...and that, friends, is this: of all the subjects and settings and general concepts for Will Ferrell to make one of his whacky parody-of-everything comedies, he chose TV journalism. Why is that? With such a jumping-off point, the movie is able to make wonderful jabs at TV news one-upsmanship and fancy hair and station wars and the need to be the first on the scene of everything even if it's as mundane as the birth of a new baby panda at the zoo. It's not a great movie. Hell, it may not even be a good movie. But there's one thing you can't argue against: it's a movie. And Sex Panther is made with bits of real panther.

### 4. *The Insider* (1999)

Michael Mann's *The Insider* is an excellent film about the far-reaching power of TV journalism, and guess what? It has some terrific ties to the fine city of Louisville, Kentucky, where MovieChopShop does its daily chopping. Much of the film was shot here (as this is where the true story originated), and



character of the film, Jeffrey Wigand (Russell Crowe again), even taught at my old high school. So next time you think to yourself “Those MovieChopShop guys ain’t such hot shit,” just remember this: the *Insider* guy taught at Shep Ramsey’s high school. That fact alone has got to make me the coolest person on the planet. But anyway, about the film itself: It’s the story of the aforementioned Wigand who worked as a scientist for Brown and Williamson tobacco. After being fired from the company, he goes and does a bit of the ol’ whistle-blowing on the company and their highly questionable practices. Al Pacino plays the newsman who coaxes the story from Wigand and puts in a good lot of effort fighting the powers that be to make sure that the American public is able to hear this important story about the chemicals that they are putting in their bodies. It’s a powerful and utterly gripping little film, not just about the lies of Big Tobacco, but also the importance of great journalism in telling Americans the stories they need to hear. It was nominated for a whole bunch of Oscars ten years ago, and to watch it, it’s not hard to see why.

### 3. *Shattered Glass* (2003)

Here’s a little-seen gem that’s one of the most psychologically fascinating stories that I’ve seen on film in recent years. Hayden Christensen (Anakin Skywalker from the *Star Wars* prequels) stars as Stephen Glass, a young journalist in the mid-nineties writing for the prestigious *New Republic* magazine. He’s a popular guy among the office and always blows people away with his outlandish



stories

and bizarre findings. And then one day the accuracy of one of his articles is called into question, and from there everything starts to unravel around him. At the end of his tenure at the New Republic, it was determined that at least 27 of the 41 articles that he wrote were either partially or entirely fabricated. *Shattered Glass* is a quickly paced and entirely stirring film that I've watched countless times and simply cannot get enough of. It's true that Christensen isn't exactly the greatest actor out there, but he's absolutely perfect for this role. It seems like a strange thing to say, but the role requires an actor who isn't very good. As a result, he's so weaselly and dopey and pathetic, and you never really believe a word that's coming out of his mouth. Peter Sarsgaard, on the other hand, is outstanding as his exhausted boss who realized that he has to deal with what Glass has done and accept the responsibility for it. Glass is such a fascinating character to watch, especially in his own imagined trips back to his high school journalism class as a guest of honor, now writing in the big leagues, welcomed back by his adoring teacher and flooded with questions from the current students. It's at once sadly pathetic and understandably human. The film was written and directed by Billy Ray, who made 2007's excellent *Breach* and also co-wrote *State of Play*.

## 2. *Zodiac* (2007)

Just before David Fincher went and got all Oscar-pandering with *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, he punched out this stunning investigative film about the hunt for the infamous Zodiac killer



who haunted San Francisco in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The film stars Jake Gyllenhaal (who never seems to age over the film's 20-year period) as Robert Graysmith, a cartoonist for The San Francisco Chronicle who becomes fascinated with the hunt for the Zodiac killer when a cypher is sent to three major area newspapers that promises to implicate the killer (and then doesn't, of course). Robert Downey, Jr. (as always) is a hell of a scene-stealer as Paul Avery, the crime reporter for the Chronicle who recruits and befriends Graysmith. It's a journalism movie in a similar way as *State of Play*, detailing an intense and rigorous journalistic investigation in the guise of a thriller. Alongside all of these happenings is a very detailed police procedural regarding the investigation. Mark Ruffalo plays detective David Toschi, the real-life cop upon whom *Dirty Harry* was loosely based. The film clocks in at a mighty lengthy 158 minutes (and the director's cut is 162 minutes), but it's an endlessly fascinating film, and there's really never a dull moment in this one.

## 1. *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2005)

George Clooney's second directorial effort is an absolutely fantastic film about journalistic integrity and the almighty weight of editorial. It's the story of Edward R. Murrow (David Strathairn),



host of CBS's *Person to Person*, and his famous stand against Senator Joseph McCarthy's communist hunts. It tells the story at a distance, never getting too personal with Murrow and keeping him mostly in the light of a dedicated professional. It's an elegant movie, unfolding in truly gorgeous black-and-white with a terrific jazz soundtrack. A rather succinct flipside to Fincher's *Zodiac*, this one is only 93 minutes long, but it's a taut and powerful little picture that packs a hell of a punch and gives you a lot to think about. In addition, it boasts one hell of a cast. Aside Strathairn in the film are Clooney, Robert Downey, Jr. (again!), Jeff Daniels, Patricia Clarkson, Frank Langella, and Ray Wise (my GOD I love Ray Wise!!). The movie was nominated for six Oscars, including Best Picture, Director, and Actor, but unbelievably went home empty-handed. It didn't even win for cinematography! (Fuckin' *Memoirs of a Geisha*.)

So there you have it. Five nifty little journalism pictures of the last ten years. It's been fun, friends. Until we meet again!



1. Quaid Says:

[April 21st, 2009 at 11:31 am](#)

Thanks for the clarification. But just so you know, I said "last good movie about reporters reporting." It's that last word that I think is different. None of these movies are about a deadline, trying to get the story etc. The insider has an element of that, but it's not the crux of the movie. Same with *Zodiac*...that one is about obsession with the killer more than getting the story. That "newsroom, deadline, gotta get it now" feeling is what I really loved about *State of Play*.



2. HansKlopek Says:

[April 21st, 2009 at 12:22 pm](#)

Yeah, there aren't very many of those, which is weird because few things are more interesting or cinematic. Not even *All the President's Men*, the quintessential news reporting movie, involved a deadline as much as it did the heady investigation of a really tough story. *State of Play* was a very good if less realistic version of that, as it takes Woodward and Bernstein several months to get to the bottom of the rabbit hole and it takes Cal McCaffery about five days. If you want a good reporter on a deadline story, Ron Howard's *The Paper* is the best I can recommend.