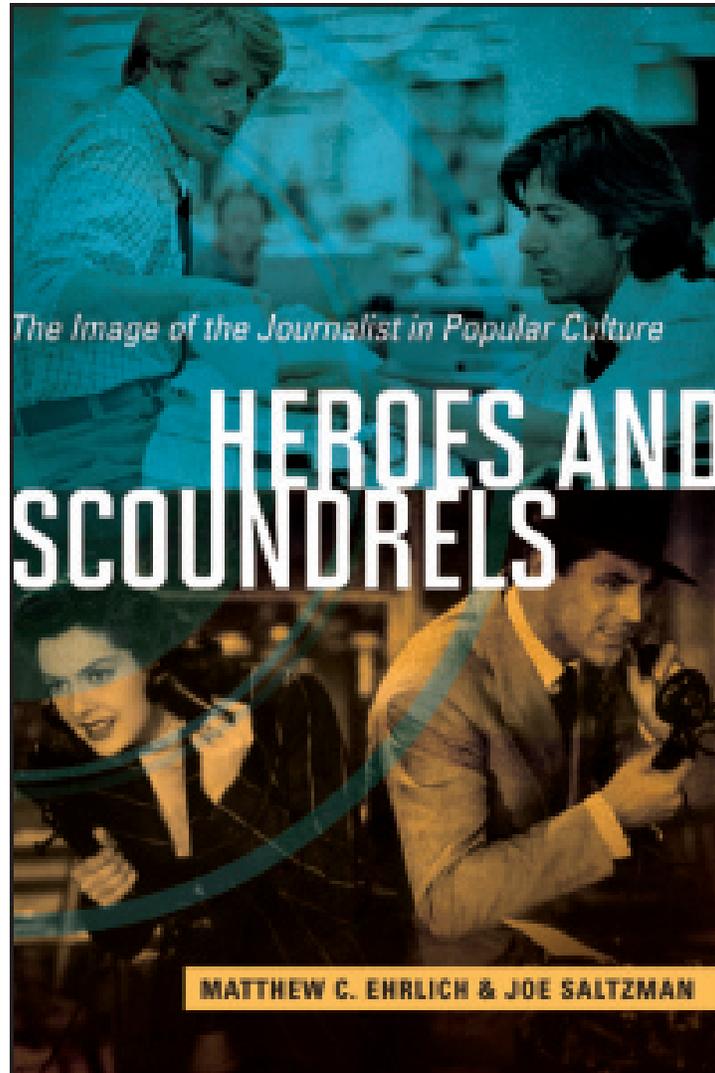


## Book Reviews



**Ehrlich, Matthew C. and Joe Saltzman. *Heroes and Scoundrels: The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015. 241 pp. \$25.**

Matthew Ehrlich and Joe Saltzman's love shines through in this book—love of journalists, love of journalism in a democracy, and love of popular culture's depictions of such. The main task of this book is description, which includes movies, television, comic books, novels, plays and radio. It is organized into six topics: history, professionalism, difference, power, image, and war. In each chapter, the authors describe with many examples how popular culture has treated journalists within each of those six frameworks and also refer to scholarly

research including media sociology, media ethics, political economy, visual communication, gender and ethnic studies, and cultural studies. Each chapter has a similar conclusion: journalists are often depicted as either heroes or scoundrels.

According to the authors, popular culture either “mythologizes or demythologizes” press history. The movie *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2005) is an example of mythologizing as Edward R. Murrow and his team challenge Senator Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s. The opposite is true

of the post-World War I novels by Emile Gauvreau, a tabloid editor. A movie of that era, *Hot News Margie* (1931), even has reporter Margie dying on the job and, at heaven's gate, being directed to hell.

The chapter on professionalism considers how popular culture portrays journalism as exciting and sometimes dangerous, and journalists as variously “scalawags, outlaws or noble.” While real journalists might be like Clark Kent, popular culture portrays them more like Superman.

The chapter on difference tackles

the subject on two fronts. The first: How popular culture describes journalists as being different from the rest of the world. The second: Differences among journalists based on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. Movie and other popular media portrayals of H.L. Mencken and Hunter S. Thompson are used to exemplify journalists as outsiders. The much lengthier second part of this chapter includes portrayals of women journalists, journalists of color, and journalists of various sexualities.

The chapter on power examines how popular culture portrays journalists as working either for or against political and economic powers. While books and television shows are mentioned, most of the examples in this chapter come from movies, including the Harry Potter films and their journalistic character, the columnist Rita Skeeter. By showing how journalism can support or criticize power, "popular culture offers visions in which a free press and a free people cannot be separated," conclude Erlich and Saltzman.

The book examines how popular culture has handled photojournalists and television

journalists, with an emphasis on how audiences relate more emotionally to visuals than to words. The authors conclude that popular culture shows us that the emotional appeal of visual media can "rouse the rabble to catastrophic ends, but in the right hands, they can move us as a people toward greatness."

The chapter on war focuses on how movies portray war correspondents, documenting their shifting characterizations from the journalist/participant in World War I and before, to the folk heroes, such as Ernie Pyle, of World War II, to the mostly more complex portrayals during the Vietnam War and after. The authors conclude this chapter asserting these portrayals can show us not only what horrible things humans can do to each other, but "[t]hey also offer the hope that amid all the world's evils, war correspondents and the rest of us can finally find a measure of grace." The book concludes with a look at how journalism in the future is portrayed in various science fiction media, novels, and video games.

Ehrlich and Saltzman's book might serve as a supplementary text in a media and society course or as a base textbook for

classes about its main topic. Those seeking more theoretical analysis will find references in the footnotes. The focus is on U.S. journalism and popular culture, but the authors are aware of the potential for expanding that view. They refer to some British productions, such as the miniseries *State of Play*, on which the U.S. movie is based, as well as the Swedish books and movies based on the *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* series, and Bollywood.

The book begins with the question: "Why study the image of the journalist in popular culture?" The authors offer three answers: journalism gives us stories and information we need to govern ourselves. We get many of our ideas about journalists and the news media and how they function from popular culture. Finally, popular culture is "a powerful tool for thinking about what journalism is and should be." At the end of the book, they add one more reason: It's fun. The last of these reasons may be the strongest. Reading this book reminds you of what you have already seen, heard, read or played, and gives you ideas for more.

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