

The Image of the Journalist in Silent Films, 1890 to 1929
Part One: 1890 to 1919

Introduction to Appendices

Joe Saltzman
Professor of Journalism and Communication
Director of the Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture (IJPC)
A Project of the Norman Lear Center
Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism
University of Southern California
Los Angeles, CA
saltzman@usc.edu

with
Liz Mitchell
Senior Research Associate
Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture (IJPC)
Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism
University of Southern California
Los Angeles, CA
Lizm2005@gmail.com

Although many of the silent films featuring journalists have been lost forever, a fairly accurate picture emerges through reviews and commentaries about the films when they first appeared on the screen. Publications referred to include *The Moving Picture World*¹, *Motion Picture News*,² *Exhibitor's Herald*,³ *Motography*,⁴ *The Film Daily (Wid's Daily)*,⁵ *Variety*,⁶ *New York Times*,⁷ *Billboard*,⁸ *New York Clipper*,⁹ *Picture-Play Magazine*,¹⁰ and *The Bioscope*,¹¹ as well as other publications including *Edison Catalog and Biograph*,¹² *Thanouser*,¹³ and *Reel Life* (Mutual Film Corporation).¹⁴ Descriptive critics¹⁵ offer detailed plot and character summations that often rival a viewing of the film itself in addition to capturing the mores and prejudices of the time.

Three key references used throughout are the Internet Movie Database (IMDb – imdb.com),¹⁶ “the world’s most popular and authoritative source for movie, TV and celebrity content,” the American Film Institute Catalog of Feature Films (afi.com),¹⁷ and the online IJPC Database of the Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture Project.¹⁸ These comprehensive databases were used in resolving conflicts involved in decisions concerning inclusion, date and genre determination, spelling and other details.

Another important online resource is the Silent Era Web site (www.silentera.com), a collection of news and information pertaining to silent era films, which also includes a comprehensive search feature and was invaluable in evaluating the status of any silent film included. The Web site also offers a complete listing of silent film websites.¹⁹

Journalism film historian Richard R. Ness, in his book, *From Headline Hunter to Superman: A Journalism Filmography*,²⁰ offers a definitive account of films featuring journalists from 1890 to 1929. His commentaries and capsule reviews were referred to throughout this project.

Whenever possible, the silent films were viewed and annotated. But many silent films are either lost or their whereabouts unknown, and some prints only exist in various museums around the world. We have noted whether a film has been viewed or not by listing the film's status and whether it was "Unavailable for Viewing," "Not Viewed" or "Viewed."

The size and quality of the entries were dependent on the various sources involved. That is the reason some films are given a paragraph and some films are given several pages. The importance of a specific film on the image of the journalist in popular culture does not always coincide with the amount of space given that film. It all depended on the availability and quality of the secondary source involved (periodicals covering the silent film era). An individual periodical might change over a period of time covering the films in less detail and even ignoring some films because of lack of space. We printed the best descriptions of the film available emphasizing the journalism in that film, or filling in important plot details necessary to understand in evaluating the final product for encoding purposes. If a film is located and screened, then more details are included under "video notes."

Each film is categorized by decade, genre, gender, ethnicity, media category, job title, and description (evaluation of the image presented by each journalist or group of journalists on a subjective scale from very positive and positive to negative and very negative, to transformative positive and transformative negative to neutral). For reference, a complete copy of the legend is printed at the bottom of each appendix.

When a film features more than one journalist character, multiple instances of gender, ethnicity, job title, and description were recorded. These results were checked and re-checked until accuracy and consensus were confirmed.

One of the key problems in doing a fair evaluation is that an audience may view a journalist positively even if that journalist acts in unethical and unprofessional ways. This can occur because of a variety of factors: an attractive actor in the role, a character the audience wants to succeed no matter what he/she does, or a situation where the end (true love) outweighs the means (negative behavior on the part of the journalist). We have tried to evaluate the images as they might be conceived by the audiences of the period using the standards of the time, not the standards of today. While we might abhor a journalist who steals, lies, deceives, ignores basic rules of journalism and label his/her actions negative, the audiences of the period often considered such journalists heroes and judged them as a positive image. Obviously some of these decisions are debatable even after hours of debate. This is a subjective category and we worked hard to reach consensus, but it is still a subjective description. However, any researcher can go through each appendix, check each film's encoding, read the comprehensive reviews and determine whether the description should be revised.

We divided characters identified as journalists into major and minor categories. A major character influences the outcome of the story or event. He or she is usually a leading character

played by a major actor of the time. A minor character does not play a significant role in the development of the film. He or she is usually a part of a larger group – i.e. journalists in a news conference or roaming around in packs, or those journalists who function as a part of the editorial or technical staff. Films with unnamed characters or characters who appeared briefly and then disappeared are included in the minor category

We decided to include films in which a newspaper story played a significant plot point. Examples include articles or pieces that expose scandals and wrong-doing, provide erroneous information (such as a fake death), alert principals about some important news or events that cause the characters to take important actions. Journalists in films with such articles were identified as “Unidentified News Staff.”

We also made a decision to include scanned copies of the original reviews in the eleven appendices whenever possible. We felt this would make it easier for future researchers who would not have to search through original periodicals as we did. When an original review was barely readable, we would retype it for easier reading. Also, summaries of the journalists/journalism in the film were also typed up.

Finally, in many of the periodicals covering the silent film industry, there are occasional articles we believe would be of interest to this audience. We’ve added some at the end of each appendix.

Legend for Encoding

A total of 1,948 films were reviewed for this study, but 1,937 were included in the final analysis because several of those films did not have a journalist although reference books indicated a key character was a journalist. Further research and viewing of the films showed that either the journalist did not appear in several chapters of a serial²¹ or a newsboy turned out to be a bootblack.²² They have been included in the appendices, but not in the analysis of the material, in which each character and event were identified and annotated and all of the table information encoded and put into the 11 appendices.

Genres²³

Action-Adventure

Animation

Drama

Comedy

Crime-Mystery-Thriller

Romance

Satire-Parody

Science Fiction-Horror

Serial

Sport

True Story-Biography-Documentary

War

Western.

Ethnicity-Race

White – a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle east or North Africa.

Black or African-American – a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.

Hispanic or Latino – a person who classifies him/herself as Mexican, Mexican-American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban or anyone who indicates that they are “another hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin.

American Indian or Alaska Native – a person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment.

Asian—a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Cambodian, and residents of Hong Kong, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands and Thailand.

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander – a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa or other Pacific Islands.

Unspecified – Mostly groups of journalists who are not easily identified by ethnicity. Also includes journalists who do not fit into ethnic categories, or were not identified as major or minor characters such as Asians, American Indian, and Indian people.

Media-Category

Newspaper

Newsreel

Magazine

Radio

Internet

Undefined (includes any media category that is undefined in the film)

Job Titles

There are 18 specific job titles. Here are the definitions. Note: these definitions are used for all of the IJPC studies so there will be job titles that weren't created until long after the silent film era was over. They are included for consistency of definition.

Anchor, Commentator: a person who presents news on television, radio, the Internet or other media, a news presenter also known as newsreader, newscaster, anchorman or anchorwoman, news anchor or simply anchor. This category also includes Commentator – a person who adds

analysis and occasionally opinion to his or her news reports for any media, usually radio or television. Also can be a Radio Announcer.

Columnist, Blogger: a person who writes a regular column or opinion piece for a newspaper, magazine, pamphlet, Internet site or any other medium.

Critic: a professional judge of art, music, literature, who judges something specializing especially professionally in the evaluation and appreciation of literary or artistic works such as a film critic or a dance critic. Forms and expresses judgments of the merits, faults, value or truth of a matter.

Cub Reporter: a person who is young and inexperienced and works in all media. An aspiring reporter who ends up in the job, a novice reporter, a trainee. Knows little about journalism. First job in journalism

Editor, Producer: a person who assigns stories and edits copy for a newspaper, magazine, Internet or other medium. Usually referred to as a city editor, managing editor or editor-in-chief. This category also includes Producer and Executive Producer – a person who controls various aspects of a news program for television, radio, the Internet and other media. He or she takes all the elements of a newscast (video, graphics, audio) and integrates them into a cohesive show. Title includes the producer of a specific news program, a field producer who is in charge of field production of individual news stories, a producer in charge of news programs. In many silent films, the publisher and editor are indistinguishable. If the journalist is primarily working as an editor -- gathering the news, writing the stories, headlines and editorials, being the person responsible for the production and distribution of the newspaper -- we use that job title (editor). If the journalist does little as an editor, but acts mostly as the owner making publishing decisions, we use that job title (publisher).

Illustrator, Cartoonist: a person who provides decorative images to illustrate a story in a newspaper, magazine or other media. A commercial artist-journalist. A cartoonist creates drawings that depict a humorous situation often accompanied by a caption. Drawings representing current public figures or issues symbolically and often satirically as in a political cartoon. A caricaturist: drawing humorous or satirical cartoons.

News Executive: a person at a broadcast station or network or other media who is in charge of the news department. Executive in charge of news. A management position. Newsreel supervisor.

News Employee: a person who works in any media with a non-descript job such as editorial assistant and other newsroom employees, printer and other workers in composition, telegraph operators, copy boy or girl, office boy or girl, newsboy or girl, web developer, graphic designer, audio and video technician, multimedia artist, digital media expert. Also includes Printer's Devil, typically a young boy who is an apprentice in a printing establishment who performed a number of tasks, such as mixing tubs of ink and fetching type.

Photojournalist and Newsreel Shooter: a person who creates still or moving images in order to tell a news story. Titles include photographer, cameraman, shooter, stringer, paparazzi and anyone else using a photographic device to make a photographic record of an event. Also includes newsreel cameramen and women.

Publisher, Media Owner: a person who is a successful entrepreneur or businessman who controls, through personal ownership or a dominant position, a mass media related company or enterprise. Referred to as a media proprietor, media mogul, media baron. A publisher usually specifically refers to someone who owns a newspaper or a collection of newspapers.

Reporter, Correspondent: a person who reports news or conducts interviews for newspapers, magazines, television, radio, Internet or any other organization that disseminates news and opinion. Referred to as a journalist, a newspaperman or woman, newsman or woman, a writer, a sob sister, a magazine writer. A freelance writer for any multimedia.

Real-Life Journalist: a person who exists in real life. Uses real name and real occupation in a fictional film or TV program. He is not played by an actor.

Sports Journalist: a person who writes, reports or edits sports news and features for any media. Includes writers, reporters, editors, columnists, commentators, hosts, online specialists.

War Correspondent, Foreign Correspondent: a correspondent is a person who contributes reports to a variety of news media from a distant, often remote, location, often covering a conflict of some sort.

Press Conference Journalists: a person who attends a news conference or press conference in which newsmakers invite journalists to hear them speak and, most often, ask questions.

Pack Journalists: a person who joins other reporters chasing after stories. They often travel in packs, usually armed with television cameras and microphones. They cover fast-breaking news by crowding, yelling, shouting, bullying and forcing their way into breaking news events. They often show up with their lights, cameras, microphones and digital recorders as they shout out questions to the usually reluctant newsmaker in question. Pack Journalism is also defined as journalism practiced by reporters in a group usually marked by uniformity of news coverage and lack of original thought or initiative. A pack of journalists can also be a group of reporters, photojournalists, war correspondents, freelance writers, even newsboys following a story or a specific activity.

Miscellaneous: Individual journalists unidentified in the film or TV program as to job description. Usually in the background functioning as editorial and technical staff.

Unidentified News Staff – Use of the news media – newspapers, magazines, radio, television, Internet, multimedia – by some unidentified news personnel or by some monolithic news organization as a significant plot point. Examples include articles or pieces that expose scandals and wrong-doing, provide erroneous information (such as a fake death), alert principals about some important news or events.

Descriptions

Major Character (Major) – a major character influences the outcome of the story or event. He or she is usually a leading character played by a major actor of the time.

Minor Character (Minor) – a minor character does not play a significant role in the development of the film or TV program. He or she is usually a part of a larger group – i.e. journalists in a news conference or roaming around in packs, or those journalists who function as a part of the editorial or technical staff.

Very Positive: This is the journalist as a heroic character. This is the journalist who does the right thing, who fights everyone and anything to get the facts out to the public. He or she often exposes corruption, solves a murder, catches a thief or saves an innocent. Everything he or she does is in the public interest. This is the kind of an image that makes the public believe that journalists are invaluable to any democracy. Journalists in a film would be evaluated as Very Positive (VP) if they have the following characteristics:

- *Shows that the journalist is an unqualified hero – he or she does everything possible to get a story out to the public resulting in making the world a better place to live.

- *Shows the public that journalism is an important profession that holds the public interest above all else, that without journalists representing the public interest, corporations, government and individuals would do terrible things. It makes the viewer feel that journalists are essential to making democracy work, to giving the public the kind of information it needs to make informative decisions in a democracy.

- *Presents an unvarnished image of the journalist as a heroic, important member of society.

Positive: These journalists will do anything to get a story that they believe is vital to the public interest, to the public welfare. They try to do their job without hurting anyone, basically people trying to do the right thing, but often frustrated by the system. They may be flawed, they may make mistakes, they may drink too much or quit their jobs in disgust, but they always seem to end up by doing the right thing by the end of the story.

- *Shows the journalist often doing wrong things in pursuing stories that are in the public interest. The good the journalist does, however, outweighs the bad.

- *Shows the public that even when journalists are offensive, their jobs are important in making a democracy work.

- *Presents an overall impression that the journalist is more of a hero than a villain.

Transformative Positive: a journalist who conveys a negative image throughout the film constantly doing negative things (unethical behavior, drinking heavily, stealing, wearing disguises, committing crimes to get a story), but who in the end serves the public interest and transforms into a positive image.

Transformative Negative: a journalist who conveys a positive image throughout the film, but ends up not serving the public interest and using the news media for personal, economic or political gain.

Negative: These journalists are villains because they use the precious commodity of public confidence in the press for their own selfish ends. They use the power of the media for his or her own personal, political, or financial gain. They care less about the public interest than their own interests. They are interested in making more money, gaining power, doing anything to get what they want.

*Show that the journalist ignores the public interest in favor of personal, economic or financial gain, thus losing the public's respect.

*Shows the public that journalism is – more often than not – a profession that is more concerned with personal gain than serving the public interest. It makes the public suspicious of journalists and creates a bad impression of what journalism is all about.

*Presents an overall impression that the journalist is more of a villain than a hero.

Very Negative: These journalists often engage in unethical and often unlawful activities getting what they want at all costs, even committing murder or serious crimes. They are manipulative and cynical. Often, they are publishers who use their power to corrupt government or business, to take advantage of the public. They are cheaters who are only interested in what is good for them, no one else. They usually are involved with the tabloid or sensationalistic press and often make up the anonymous news media chasing after individuals without regard for their privacy or safety.

*Show that the journalist is an unqualified villain who has no redeeming value, who has no concern for basic values, who will do anything to get what he or she wants regardless of the damage caused.

*Shows the public that journalism is a profession filled with arrogant, morally bankrupt individuals who only care about themselves and not about the public or an individual. These journalists ignore the public interest completely.

*Presents an unvarnished image of the journalist as a villain who engages in unethical and often unlawful activities including crime and murder.

Neutral: These journalists usually make up the anonymous members of the press corps and usually can be seen at press conferences taking notes or reacting to what the person is saying. They are usually nondescript characters who are simply there as journalists doing their job without offending anyone. They are often in the background and figure slightly in the plot or action of the film or television program. They are not major characters.

¹Available on the Internet: Media History Digital Library: Online Access to the Histories of Cinema, Broadcasting and Sound offers a complete digital edition of the first 12 years of *Moving Picture World*, “the key motion picture trade publication that covered the film business during the transformation of the viewing experience from the nickelodeon to the movie palace.” Scanned from the original color magazines, the MHDL’s collection of *Moving Picture World* begins in 1907 and extends through June 1919, a collection of 70,000 pages, searchable and free. *Moving Picture World*, 1907-1926 is now available. <http://mediahistoryproject.org/2012/08/06/the-complete-moving-picture-world-1907-1919/>.

² *Motion Picture News* (1913-1929), available from Media History Project.

³ *Exhibitor’s Herald* (1917-1927), available from Media History Project.

⁴ *Motography* (1911-1918), available from Media History Project.

⁵ *Wid's Daily* (1918-1921), then became *Film Daily* (1922-1929), available from Media History Project.

⁶ *Variety*, the best known and most important trade paper in the history of American entertainment, 1905-1929, available from the Library of Congress, most libraries and the Media History Digital Library online edition.

⁷ *The New York Times Film Reviews, 1907-1929*. Available online by titles. www.nytimes.com

⁸ *Billboard* (1894-1921), available from the Media History Project.

⁹ *New York Clipper* (1855-1923), available from Media History Project.

¹⁰ *Picture-Play Magazine* (1915-1929), available from Media History Project.

¹¹ *The Bioscope*, listing of silent film journals online, <http://thebioscope.net/2010/02/28/silent-film-journals-online/>.

¹² *Edison Company and the Biograph Company* publicity fliers contain extensive information on individual film titles. Some of their motion picture catalogues are available at Rutgers, The Thomas Edition Papers (<http://edison.rutgers.edu/index.htm>). Also available in various editions of *The Moving Picture World*, 1907-1926.

¹³ *Thanhouser Company Film Preservation, Inc.* Thanhouser Company was founded in 1909 and by 1917 had released more than 1,000 silent films. Internet site: <http://www.thanhouser.org/index.html>

¹⁴ *Reel Life*, 1913-1915, available from Media History Project.

¹⁵ Especially valuable were reviews and commentaries in *The Moving Picture World*, *Motion Picture News*, *Exhibitors Herald*, *The Film Daily* (*Wid's Daily*) and *Variety*, which were used extensively throughout this project.

¹⁶ The Internet Movie Database (IMDb) is an online database of information related to films, television programs and video games, including cast, production crew, fictional characters, biographies, plot summaries, trivia and reviews. By June 2016, IMDb had approximately 3.7 million titles in its database.

¹⁷ The AFI Catalog of Feature films is the most authoritative filmographic database on the web. It includes entries on nearly 60,000 American feature-length films and 17,000 short films produced from 1893-2011. Director Martin Scorsese wrote, "No other source of information is as complete and accurate, and no other source is produced with the scrupulous level of attention to scholarship and research as the AFI catalog." The AFI catalog "is a unique filmographic resource providing an unmatched level of comprehensiveness and detail on every feature-length film produced in America or financed by American production companies. Detailed information on cast, crew, plot summaries, subjects, genres and historical notes are included for each film." No page numbers are referenced since the catalog can easily be referenced by searching a specific title.

¹⁸ The Online IJPC Database includes more than 89,000 entries (2016) including 20,330 film titles. In addition, various online databases and Web sites, including the Internet Movie Database (IMDB), and Richard R. Ness' definitive journalism filmography (*From Headline Hunter to Superman: A Journalism Filmography*) were searched for verification and new possibilities.

¹⁹ Among the silent film sites of some value is *Silent Hall of Fame* (silent-hall-of-fame.org), which offers movie reviews and silent film videos.

²⁰ Ness, professor at Western Illinois University, is the chief film consultant-researcher and associate director of the Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture, a project of the Norman Lear Center, USC Annenberg. He is currently working on an updated edition of his classic filmography and has been instrumental in sharing new information received on films from 1890 to 1929.

²¹ *Zudora* (1914, chapters 2 to 6) and *The Mystery of the Double Cross* (1917, chapters 1 to 6).

²² *The Adventures of Billy* (1911).

²³ Many genre designations could include multiple designations. The first genre listed in the Internet Movie DataBase has been used for continuity purposes. When the IMDB fails to offer a genre, other sources were used to form a consensus.