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Headline hunters: Two new films underscore Hollywood's ever-changing fascination with journalists

Sunday, October 09, 2005

BY STEPHEN WHITTY
Star-Ledger Staff

STEPHEN WHITTY
Movies

For journalists, it was a sort of good news/bad news sort of thing, although the good news was hardly positive: Forty-nine percent of Americans think they're liars.

The bright side was that, last year, the number had reached 55 percent.

Of course, the Gallup Poll is too polite to use the word "liar." But asked last month if they had "a great deal" or even "a fair amount" of trust in the media, a bare 50 percent of respondents said yes. And judging by a recent slate of movies, Hollywood agrees.

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Mainstream moviemakers used to see reporters as heroes, truth-tellers who exposed corruption; now they're bit players, yelling fatuous questions. When they do show up as main characters, generally in indie films, they're shabby symbols, walking examples of moral compromise.

Three new movies, taking place during three different decades of American journalism, illustrate the rapid decline of the profession's image.

In last month's "Capote," a story of the '60s and the New Journalism, we

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meet a writer who falls in love with one of his subjects, lies to his book's approach, misrepresents his research and then co for an execution, merely so he can finally finish his manuscrip

In next week's "Where the Truth Lies," a story about fame an celebrity journalism, we're introduced to two separate writers, whom is above breaking the law, sleeping with a source or do anything to earn a fat profit off their famous subjects.

In the current "Good Night, and Good Luck" -- a film about on journalism's few untarnished idols, '50s icon Edward R. Murro watch him stooping to silly show-biz interviews, vainly fighting influences, and finally warning that television risks becoming j of lights and wires."

And that movie's supposed to be a hymn to journalism.

"I'm the son of a journalist," says George Clooney, who direct Murrow film (and co-stars as Murrow's producer, Fred Friendl worked at WKRC in Cincinnati for 15 years, and in Buffalo, ar Lake. I grew up on the floor of a newsroom... So I don't see th actor telling journalists how to do their job. I see it as pointing greatness, really, as saying how high we can aim."

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