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Journalists in the Movies

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You see it in many movies -- the criminal suspect or celebrity pulls up in a car and is immediately surrounded by a mob of journalists with their microphones, tape recorders and cameras. They are portrayed more like piranha than people.

Journalists should be familiar to moviegoers. They've appeared in close to 1,000 films mostly for entertainment value. Few are based on a true story about real reporters such as Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein in "All the President's Men."

For example, Bill Murray is a TV reporter covering "Groundhog Day" and living the same day over and over and over again. And don't forget, Clark Kent works at the Daily Planet. Yes, Superman is a journalist.

We've compiled a list of films about journalism that are worth watching. They are divided into films about newspapers, television news and foreign correspondents.

Newspapers

"All the President's Men" (1976): This stands above any other movie about journalism. Washington Post reporters Bob Woodward (Robert Redford) and Carl Bernstein (Dustin Hoffman) doggedly follow a story that ultimately leads to the downfall of President Richard Nixon. The film earned eight Oscar nominations, including Best Picture. It was named best film by the New York Film Critics, the National Society of Film Critics and the National Board of Review. Oscar wins included Best Adapted Screenplay and Best Supporting Actor (Jason Robards for his portrayal of Ben Bradlee, the executive editor). See our [Special Feature](#) on this film.



"Citizen Kane" (1941): This movie consistently makes lists of the "best films ever made." It employs a variety of film-making techniques: quick cuts, imaginative dissolves, deep-focus photography. Many presume Charles Foster Kane was based on



William Randolph Hearst, who controlled a vast media empire.

Director, star and writer Orson Welles, just 25, denied the claim. But a Hearst employee, Louella Parsons, who wrote a gossip column read nationally, launched a campaign to ban the film and even have it destroyed. Hearst, 79 at the time, reportedly saw the movie and liked it. In the film, a reporter traces the life of Kane, a newspaper magnate who aspires to political office. The film received nine Oscar nominations, including Best Picture, but won just one for Best Original Screenplay (Welles and Herman J. Mankiewicz, a former reporter). "Rosebud."

"His Girl Friday" (1940): Howard Hawks directed this comical remake of "The Front Page" (1931). Editor Walter Burns (Cary Grant) finds out that his ex-wife, Hildy Johnson (Rosalind Russell), is going to quit as a reporter and get married to lead a normal life. When a convicted killer escapes the night before he is to hang, Burns convinces Johnson that she could get one last scoop before it's over. He also hopes to win her back in the meantime. The film moves at breakneck speed. After the actors learned their lines, Hawks instructed them to talk fast and move quickly. Hawks used four microphones to pick up the many reporters talking at the same time.



At points the actors spoke at 240 words per minute -- 130 words per minute faster than normal. The film gives you a glimpse into old-fashioned journalism, when reporters rushed to the phones to dictate their stories in order to make deadline. Russell got this great role, which was written for a man in the original, after names like Katharine Hepburn, Jean Arthur, Claudette Colbert and Carole Lombard turned it down.

"The Big Carnival" (1951): This Billy Wilder film shows how a cynical reporter Charles Tatum (Kirk Douglas) tries to exploit the "human interest story." When a man gets trapped in a mine, Tatum does whatever he can to keep the story alive so he can

continue writing exclusive stories. He even has an affair with the trapped man's wife (Jan Sterling). All kinds of groups flock to the town, including vendors, creating a carnival atmosphere. But before Tatum and the woman can cash in on the situation, even more tragedy strikes. Originally titled "Ace in the Hole," the film was extremely controversial. It received an Oscar nomination for Best Original Screenplay. Unfortunately, it's not available on video.

"It Happened One Night" (1934): Claudette Colbert plays a runaway heiress, Ellie Andrews, whose father puts up a \$10,000 reward to get her back. Peter Warne (Clark Gable), a recently fired reporter, recognizes her and thinks his scoop will get him back his job. Of course in this Frank Capra romantic comedy, they fall in love. The film includes the classic hitchhiking scene in which Warne fails and Andrews triumphs by showing a little leg. One of three movies to win Oscars for the five major categories (Best Picture, Director, Actor, Actress and (Adapted) Screenplay. The others were "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" (1975) and "The Silence of the Lambs" (1991).

"Meet John Doe" (1941): Yet another Frank Capra film. When reporter Ann Mitchell (Barbara Stanwyck) is fired, she angrily writes a piece about an idealist named John Doe, the Average Joe who is pushed around by everyone above him. In a Mitchell-written letter to the paper, Doe says he'll leap from City Hall on Christmas Eve. The public response is incredible. Mitchell confesses to the editor that he doesn't exist. She goes to the politically ambitious publisher D. B. Norton (Edward Arnold) with a scheme to get an impostor, John Willoughby (Gary Cooper), to keep the story alive. The John Doe movement takes on a life of its own. And the publisher plans to use John Doe as a launching pad for his run at the presidency. When Doe threatens to blow the whistle, the publisher tells a convention crowd that John Doe is a fake and has stolen donations. The movement dissolves. John Doe feels the only way he can revive the movement is throwing himself off City Hall on Christmas Eve. But Mitchell and a number of Joe Doe Club members stop him. The publisher's presidential dreams are squashed. The film received an Oscar nomination for Best Original Screenplay.

"Deadline USA" (1952): Ed Humes (Humphrey Bogart) is the editor of The Day, which is about to be sold by the greedy daughters of the newspaper's founder. Meanwhile, the paper has been on a crusade to expose the local mob boss, Rienzi (Martin Gabel), by linking him to a murder. The mother of the victim has

been reading the stories and turns over her daughter's diary. The last edition of the newspaper features the diary, which proves that Rienzi is a murderer and the head of the city's organized crime. Hutcheson also wins back his estranged wife (Kim Hunter). Producer Sol C. Siegel and writer/director Richard Brooks previously worked in the newspaper business. The film also stars Ethel Barrymore and Ed Begley.



"Absence of Malice" (1981): This movie paints the opposite picture of the "Fourth Estate" to that portrayed in "All the President's Men." Paul Newman is Michael Gallagher, a legitimate businessman who happens to be

the son of a dead mobster. A federal investigator is out to get him and leaks information to reporter Megan Carter (Sally Field). She writes a story linking Gallagher to the disappearance of a labor leader. Carter's questionable ethics continue when she gets involved with Gallagher. Gallagher later plots his revenge and gets it. Directed by Sydney Pollack, the film earned Oscar nominations for Newman (Best Actor), Melinda Dillon (Best Supporting Actress) and Kurt Luedtke, a former reporter (Best Original Screenplay).

"The Mean Season" (1985): A serial killer contacts reporter Malcolm Anderson (Kurt Russell), who ends up having him as an exclusive source. After each killing, the murderer gets front-page attention as do Anderson's stories. When Anderson becomes the bigger celebrity, the "Numbers Killer" kidnaps the reporter's live-in girlfriend (Mariel Hemingway). This film also touches on journalistic ethics but turns into a typical Hollywood thriller. Richard Masur plays Russell's editor. The screenplay is based on the novel "In the Heat of the Summer" by former Miami Herald police reporter John Katzenbach.



"The Paper" (1994): The movie shows you 24 hours in the life of a New York tabloid scattered with colorful newspaper characters that deliver "the daily miracle." Henry Hackett (Michael Keaton) is the city editor who's at odds with Alicia Clark (Glenn Close), the managing editor. After two white businessmen are slain, two young black men are arrested. Hackett thinks they were set up.

Clark wants to go with the story, even if it's wrong. Robert Duvall plays Bernie White, the old-fashioned, crusty executive editor. McDougal (Randy Quaid) is a gun-carrying columnist who was once a great beat reporter. The film does a good job capturing the hectic pace of a newsroom. However, director Ron Howard adds some Hollywood moments like Hackett and Clark having a fistfight in the pressroom after Hackett utters the rarely heard "stop the presses." It also has a number of cameos, including NBC's Bob Costas, USA Today's Jeannie Williams and MTV's Kurt Loder. The screenplay was written by David Koepp and his brother Stephen, a senior editor at Time magazine. Post reviews from [Style](#) and [Weekend](#).

"The Pelican Brief" (1994): In this film based on John Grisham's novel, Denzel Washington plays Gray Grantham, a reporter at the fictitious Washington Herald. After two Supreme Court justices are murdered, law student Darby Shaw (Julia Roberts) comes up with a theory about their deaths and writes it in a brief. Her boyfriend and professor, Thomas Callahan (Sam Shepherd), shows the brief to a friend who is an FBI legal analyst. Callahan is then killed with a car bomb meant for Shaw. She contacts Grantham because her boyfriend was a fan of his writing and reporting. With help from the FBI director, Shaw and Grantham uncover evidence to prove her brief to be true. Washington visited The Washington Post to research his role. The movie made \$100.6 million at the box office.

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[Back to the top](#)

Journalists in the Movies:

[Introduction](#) | [Newspapers](#) | [Television](#) | [Foreign Correspondents](#)

Go to [Newseum Front Page](#) | Go to [Washington World](#)
