

## 5 movies that get the newsroom right

By **John P. Avlon**, CNN contributor  
 updated 4:02 PM EDT, Sat June 23, 2012



COURTESY OF WARNER BROS.

In "All the President's Men" (1976), Dustin Hoffman, center, plays Carl Bernstein and Robert Redford is Bob Woodward.

### STORY HIGHLIGHTS

John Avlon: "The Newsroom" debuts this Sunday, a modern depiction of journalism

He names 5 good journalism movies that carry a sense of purpose, are entertaining

They include "Network," "All the President's Men," "Broadcast News," he says

"Good Night and Good Luck" a small masterpiece, he says; "His Girl Friday" a retro classic

**Editor's note:** John Avlon is a CNN contributor and senior political columnist for Newsweek and The Daily Beast. He is co-editor of the book "Deadline Artists: America's Greatest Newspaper Columns" and won the National Society of Newspaper Columnists' award for best online column in 2012. He is a regular contributor to "Erin Burnett OutFront" and is a member of the OutFront Political Strike Team. For more political analysis, tune in to "Erin Burnett OutFront" at 7 ET weeknights.

**(CNN)** -- With the debut of Aaron Sorkin's new show The Newsroom on HBO this Sunday, I've been thinking about the best film depictions of journalism in American history. Any "best-of" list is inherently subjective, but you definitely don't need to be a journalist to appreciate the sense of purpose these classic films provide.

So without further ado and just for fun on a summer weekend, below are my nominations for the top five journalism films of all time.

**"Network":** Paddy Chayefsky's satire is still razor sharp after almost 40 years, offering a prophetic look at what would happen when news desks started answering to entertainment divisions.

The film also managed to anticipate the rise of Reality TV, with one surreal side plot in which a self-styled "liberation army" gets its own television show and immediately goes from talking about the proletariat to negotiating net versus gross contracts. But in the end it is a morality play, featuring William Holden, Faye Dunaway and Peter Finch as Howard Beale, a network anchor over the edge of a nervous breakdown who shouts the immortal line "I'm mad as hell and

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Roxanne Jones says the trial opened her eyes to dangers of sexual predators in kids sports and the need to arm children--and adults--with information

### 5 movies that get the newsroom right

updated 4:02 PM EDT, Sat June 23, 2012



John Avlon says when the new Aaron Sorkin HBO drama "The Newsroom" debuts, it will join a slew of Hollywood depictions of journalists at work. They're worth watching again

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Frida Ghitis: Sometimes, when you least expect it, the good guys win. Sometimes, the good guy is a woman -- a strong, wise and extraordinarily brave woman, such as Aung San Suu Kyi.

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Ruben Navarrette says Mitt Romney waded into the immigration issue with a talk to Latino officials, but has not yet shown he's willing to buck his party on specifics

I'm not gonna take it anymore!"

During the meteoric rise and fall of Glenn Beck, I was half convinced that he'd announce he was punking us by trying to make Howard Beale come alive.

**Entertainment: What Aaron Sorkin learned from CNN for "Newsroom"**

**"All the President's Men"**: The genius of this dramatic depiction of Watergate is that the movie keeps you in suspense even when everybody knows how the story is going to end.

Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman are a perfect pairing as Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, with Jason Robards playing Ben Bradlee, all capturing the chase of a great story as it unfolds.

The film was made just a few years after Nixon's resignation, but somehow it does not sacrifice the film's sense of perspective on a time when journalists uncovered a corrosive conspiracy at the highest level of the government and toppled a president who only 20 months before had won a 49-state landslide.



John Avlon

**"Good Night, and Good Luck"**: This George Clooney-directed 2005 film is a small masterpiece, filmed in black and white. David Strathairn perfectly captures the integrity of Edward R. Murrow facing down Joe McCarthy at a time when the witch hunt for the Communist enemy within was ending careers and creating an atmosphere of fear.

The film is funny and smart, with tight construction and an ensemble cast that includes Robert Downey Jr. and a chubbied-up Clooney as Murrow's producer Fred Friendly. The opening scene speech, taken from Murrow's own words, should be regular required viewing for anyone in the news industry. Key line: "To be persuasive we must be believable; to be believable we must be credible; to be credible we must be truthful."

**"Broadcast News"**: Armed with a perfect cast of Albert Brooks, William Hurt and Holly Hunter, "Broadcast News" is a brilliant comedy that captures the outsized influence of the anchorman -- played by Jack Nicholson -- back in the days of the Big Three. Adding depth are cutaway scenes depicting the characters as neurotic children.

It is ultimately a story about ambition and unrequited love, offering a useful, if not particularly uplifting, meditation on the unsteady boundary between infatuation, love and trust.



**"His Girl Friday"**: Howard Hawk directed this 1930s slapstick comedy, which is based on the Ben Hecht-penned screenplay for The Front Page. Cary Grant plays editor Walter Burns trying to woo his ex-wife and fellow journalist Hildy Johnson (Rosalind Russell) back to the world of the newsroom, with its roll-top desks, three-martini lunches, rotary phones and manual typewriters clacking away. In a nice bit of symmetry, the film debuted the overlapping dialogue technique that Aaron Sorkin later perfected.

**Honorable mentions**: Falling outside this list include "The Year of Living Dangerously," "Ace in the Hole," Will Ferrell's epic, hilarious performance as Ron Burgundy in "Anchorman," and the fifth season of "The Wire." Buy them, rent them, download them - but most of all, enjoy them.

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John Thune says it doesn't take an economist to realize that the president's economic policies have failed to make things better

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LZ Granderson says it won't be Fast and Furious that determines if President Obama will be re-elected; it will be his performance in the first presidential debate

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Tim Stanley says there's a storied history of aggressive questioning by reporters, especially when presidents make themselves unavailable.

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Lawyers for Jonathan Pollard cite strong support from former U.S. national security officials for his release in his 27th year of imprisonment

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James Cantor says one cannot choose to not be a pedophile, but one can choose to not be a child molester

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Dean Obeidallah says Christianity in America is being hijacked by radical right, transforming Christ's teaching of "love thy neighbor" into "Hate the gays, Mormons and Muslims."

## Lisa Brown: Silenced for saying (shock!) 'vagina'

updated 11:14 AM EDT, Thu June 21, 2012



Michigan Rep. Lisa Brown says when she was banned from the House floor for saying "vagina," thousands of women saw that what was really going on was a fight for reproductive rights

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**burnout321**

IMO we no longer are treated to the news, we are treated to entertainment. I cannot tell you how many times I have had to turn the station from CNN because of many of their self promoting wind bags. I don't turn on the news to see "bubbly" "pretty" "exciting" people, I turn on the news to see the news. My god, today the news networks spend more time with "teasers" than the real news. "And after the break we will tell you about the 2000 terrorist who have surrounded the white house." and then after the break... "Now here is a happy story about how Fido walked 2000 miles to find his old family." (run video) "Now, speaking of 2000... thats the number of terrorist that have surrounded the white house... now stand by and get the news right after this break."



**Gas Predictor**

But when you change the station, where do you change to? Have you found an actual source for news? Please, share. I'd really like to know.

My main options for TV "news" to accompany breakfast:

- CNN/HLN: Vacuous, bubbly, self-promoting, chattering.
- Several local or regional broadcast stations: Like CNN/HLN with a regional accent.
- Fox News: Jarringly opinionated. Clogs my filters. (And I'm a bit conservative, but I would much prefer information over agitation.)

What else is there?



**Amfleet**

I go to the BBC and 60 Minutes for my news. I come here for laughs.



**Gas Predictor**

Can't get BBC or AL-Jazeera on my cable system at breakfast time. Stuck with SpongeBob.

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**ClarkMN**

If you haven't seen "Network", (the top one on this list) you need to see it. It was written almost 35 years ago, yet it seems just as relevant to today's audiences. It's kind of scary how relevant it is.

**Bozobub**

Gas Predictor, pretty much you're stuck with the BBC and AL-Jazeera =/ ...

**mrtweedy**

burnout: You sound like you're mad as hell and can't take it anymore. Calm down, "Vox Populi" will be on in a few minutes.

**oddjob3422**

It has always been that way. The only difference is in the preferences of people on how they want to be entertained.

**burnout321**

I watch reruns of "The Mary Tyler Moore Shoe" to remind me what is really happening behind the scenes, and then I get online and read my local paper.

**cpc65**

All The President's Men is one of my favorite movies. If you are the type who can watch a film without car chases, gun battles, CGI effects, meaningless nonsensical plots and pop music sound tracks give this one a viewing.

**oddjob3422**

Unfortunately, you just described the modern movie goer's preferences.

**cpc65**

Yup

**Charlie1951**

If only network and cable news execs would read \*and follow\* Ed Murrow's advice. But recently the news programming with the least bias, one way or the other, seems to get the lowest ratings. People don't want news, they want to be reinforced in their preconceptions.

**the\_punisher**

Where is Citizen Kane?

This list is worthless without the AFI's #1 movie. I can also think of several others that do justice to the newsrooms ( NOT INFOTAINMENT ) of their days.

This guy never set foot in a REAL NEWSROOM, just an INFOTAINMENT SET.

I remember the lyrics to " Dirty Laundry ". That song does a better job on exposing today's

INFOTAINMENT SET ( not a real " newsroom ).



**Bozobub**

Good point. While any list like this IS subjective, it's hard to believe there's no mention at all of CK.



**Angry Deuce**

We could use a real-life Howard Beale these days, and no, that sycophant Glenn Beck, either.

If only we had a modern-day Walter Cronkite...



**Guest**

Unfortunately Walter Cronkite would never get on the air today. He is not what people want to see on the news these days. They want pretty young faces telling them just what they want to hear. Americans don't want to be well-informed, they want to be well-entertained. And the last thing they want is to have their biases or beliefs challenged in any way. Unfortunately the media is just giving us what we ask for.



**Gas Predictor**

Guest, I wish I could "like" your reply more than once. Your statement is everything that is wrong with "news" today.

I, for one, would like to be informed. Walter Cronkite would get my vote over the vacuous yuk-yuk self-promotion that passes for a "news" report any day of the week and any time of the day.

Hint 1: Tell me what happened, don't tell me how you feel about it. If I feel anything about it, that's my business (and an indication that you did a good job reporting it). I really don't want to hear about how some reporter fresh out of high school feels about the news. (And yes, most of you look to me like you're fresh out of high school.)

Hint 2: I don't want to eavesdrop, I want to be addressed. When a reporter in the field makes a report,...

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**Gas Predictor**

I rather suspect that Glenn Beck knows how full of crap he is, but he knows that it sells. Yes, he crashed rather hard, but he's not selling pencils on the street corner. He has simply whittled his empire to its undyingly loyal core. (I'm a conservative, and I consider Glenn Beck a minor embarrassment. I might consider him a major embarrassment if I paid more attention to him.)



**Angry Deuce**

Yeah, right. He doesn't know his \*\*\* from a hole in the ground. The guy's a Birther for Christ's sake...



**enfilmigult**

"In a nice bit of symmetry, [His Girl Friday] debuted the overlapping dialogue technique that Aaron Sorkin later perfected."

Oh ouch. I liked the article, but come on. Howard Hawks perfected it all by himself, Aaron Sorkin imitated it well.



**ClarkMN**

Totally agree



**ibsurfing**

A CNN contributor thinks he knows what a NEWS room looks like???? LOL!!!! I'll be giggling about that one for quite a while.....)



**Masta1978**

The news mwdia is bought and sold by the government!!! The media is just as corrupt as the Obama administration!!!



**Bozobub**

OK, I might buy that, once you explain what "mwdia" is.

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