

# GFF

The theme of this year's retrospective is Truth to Power, and we're beginning with All the President's Men because it is the film that led me to the theme. Maybe in this instance it wasn't quite a case of "follow the money", but still, the sense of picking up a lead and running with it is definitely how this year's retrospective came together.

Last September, when Robert Redford had just passed away, I was searching around for a retrospective idea and I was also thinking about Redford's legacy as a filmmaker, a festival founder, a mentor and an activist, and how for me All the President's Men stands as the greatest achievement in a career full of them.

It is so successful in the way it balances perfectly-crafted Hollywood entertainment with a sense of connection to the real world and real issues happening.

And it struck me that this story, so of its time in many ways, taking place in an analogue journalism environment that doesn't exist anymore, still has much to say to the moment we are living in.

It wasn't far from that realisation to thinking about other great films which play out similar David and Goliath scenarios, like Erin Brockovich or Selma – or films that serve to call out hypocritical modes of leadership or unjust power structures, whether through comedy and ridicule as in Duck Soup and Dr Strangelove, or documentary-like realism as in The Battle of Algiers.

So over the next 11 days you'll have the chance to watch (for free) 10 films that have been selected because they all represent cinema's unique ability to show us a different perspective. These 10 films each find ways to unpick, challenge and bring some humanity to bear on powerful institutions and characters, both real and fictional.

All the President's Men – 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year

The film was Robert Redford's project, which he drove through development for several years before it went into production – he didn't plan to be in it, but Warner Brothers insisted if they were going to pay for it they needed those golden good looks in front of the camera, not just behind it.

It was Redford who had the idea of focusing on Woodward and Bernstein, the two reporters who broke the story, and how they ended up working together. He was interested in "the story underneath the story". In 1975, everybody knew the outcome of Watergate, but they didn't know the details of how the truth had ultimately come to light.

The director was Alan J. Pakula, who had directed Jane Fonda to an Oscar a few years earlier in Kluge, and had just made the political conspiracy thriller The Parallax View with Warren Beatty. With these films and All the President's Men, Pakula was integral in shaping a particular golden age in Hollywood cinema – you can see the stylistic influence of these understated, intelligent 70s thrillers continuing today.

The cast Redford assembled around himself is sensational – particularly Jason Robards as the formidable Washington Post editor Ben Bradlee – and of course Dustin Hoffman as Carl Bernstein, Woodward's equal and opposite. That was a key piece of casting, and one of the main reasons for the film's success as an entertainment is that balance between them – both as stars sharing the screen, and as these two chalk and cheese characters. Before they began shooting Pakula asked Hoffman if there was anything in particular he wanted from him. Hoffman said – "make me look more handsome than Redford".

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It was nominated for 8 Oscars, winning 4, but a key player not to be even nominated was Gordon Willis, the cinematographer, hailed by all involved as the key architect of the film's success. The film's writer William Goldman – who did win an Oscar for his screenplay – has a fascinating chapter about his involvement with *All the President's Men* in his book *Adventures in the Screen Trade*, and in there he refers to Willis as “the hero of the film”.

Affectionately known as the ‘prince of darkness’, Willis had been responsible for the strikingly shadowy cinematography of the first two *Godfather* films – and here brought that vision to bear on the film's famous ‘Deep Throat’ scenes. Equally significant was his deep focus work on the newspaper room scenes, allowing action to unfold on multiple planes and creating a hugely influential visual language in the process.

Ask about journalism today – implicit in *All the President's Men* is the public trust that Woodward and Bernstein appreciate – the weight of responsibility that they carry, to tell the truth as they discover it. The kind of office they work in is long gone, as is their whole mode of research. But that commitment to truth and responsibility to trust – is that still present in the journalism we read in newspapers today?

Thanks for coming – enjoy *All the President's Men*.