STRANGE BUT TRUE TALES FROM HOLLYWOOD: THE BUREAUCRAT AS MOVIE HERO

Mordecai Lee
Department of Governmental Affairs
University of Wisconsin Milwaukee

Susan C Paddock
Department of Professional Development and Applied Studies
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Abstract

Popular culture reflects the hostility to government and bureaucracy that is deeply embedded in American history, society and culture. Therefore, movies that depict evil government or villainous bureaucrats are relatively common. Are there any movies that defy this stereotype? As an exploratory research effort, the authors sought to identify any movies that depict admirable, even heroic, bureaucrats. Has the movie-going public ever seen a good public administrator? Using a wide variety of sources and exploratory research methodologies, the authors were able to identify 20 movies that presented positive characterizations of government managers. All were men and most were involved in a uniformed service. Notwithstanding the small number of bureaucratic heroes in movies, public administrationists can proudly identify themselves with these Hollywood crumbs. Faculty may wish to use these 20 movies as visual examples of the courage sometimes needed to be a moral and ethical public administrator. Finally, readers are invited to submit to the authors nominations of additional films that meet the criteria used in the article in order to enhance the ongoing comprehensiveness of the list.

Introduction and Review

Some values of modern day America have been unchanged since the

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founding of the country. The American War of Independence was at its core an anti-government revolution, spurred on by the perception of the arbitrary and tyrannical exercise of governmental powers by the British government *(Spicer, 1995, p. 36)*. Notwithstanding many generations since 1776 and the millions of new Americans who have immigrated to the United States, this cultural strain has persisted unabated. Today's average citizens would fit in well alongside their predecessors of more than two centuries ago: quick to criticize government, derisive of public servants and assuming that government is always wrong and wasteful.

One contemporary manifestation of the American hostility to government is bureaucrat bashing *(Goodsell, 2000; Lee, 2000)*. American culture gives less respect to its civil servants than do other inheritors of British political culture. This automatic negativity towards government administrators can be expected to persist and "its further intensification can probably be expected in the years and decades ahead" *(Goodsell, 2000, p. 130)*.

The arts both reflect culture and inform our understanding of institutions and traditions. Fiction is bound "in a peculiar and complex way to the world of 'facts'" *(Lodge, 1996)*. Waldo *(1968)* specifically noted the connection between public administration and the arts. McCurdy observed that the arts "enter public consciousness or pop culture and become part of the cognitive base for making decisions about public policy and administration" *(1995, p. 499)*. Based on the cultural norm of suspicion of government, it is not surprising that the arts reflect American hostility to bureaucrats *(Lichter, Lichter and Amundson, 1999; Holzer, 1997; Goodsell and Murray, 1995, especially Part III; Larkin, 1993)*.

Among the arts, film is considered a particularly powerful medium. Because the camera controls the attention of the viewer, it 'stitches' or 'sutures' the viewer into the narrative of the film. Film allows viewers to peer into reality in an uncommon way and see something they might otherwise miss *(Champoux, 1999; Dubnick, 2000)*. Of the arts, the cinematic experience is among the most psychologically persuasive.

Politics and government are often subjects of film. Gianos *(1998)* recently examined in detail the depictions of politicians in movies, finding them largely negative. Lee reviewed the cinematic image of government spokespersons *(2001)*. When it comes to public administration, "cinema wields the heaviest hammer," depicting the profession in unforgiving images *(Holzer and Slater, 1995, p. 77)*. The image of good citizen versus bad government is a common movie theme. Government is viewed darkly

through Hollywood's lens *(ASPA, 2000, p. 38)*. One observer recently summarized contemporary Hollywood trends:

> Plausibility aside, Hollywood has created a new and powerful enemy. Worse than Godzilla. Scarier than the Soviets. It has turned a democracy of, by and for the people into a corrupt cabal that has turned against its citizens. Granted, a healthy suspicion of power is as American as apple pie - the overthrow of tyranny is our founding legend. …Hollywood has produced some stellar Washington conspiracy thrillers in the past. But movies, television, the Internet and pop culture are virtually exploding with conspiratorial plots starring Washington as the heavy. Writers and producers could never create a monster unless people bought it. *(Schulte, 1997)*

Defining the Movie Bureaucrat Hero: Methodology

It is relatively easy to find examples of evil government and villainous bureaucrats in American cinema. However, are there any movies depicting effective and responsive bureaucrats? Has the movie-going public ever experienced a good public administrator?

Previously, there has been no comprehensive effort to identify and examine the positive depictions of government managers in film. This may be due to the narrowness of the category and of the usually minor role these bureaucrats play in each movie. Notwithstanding these limitations, this exploration is an effort to identify and analyze the film depictions of public administrators as heroic figures.

A search of heroic bureaucrats in film is an attempt to parallel Friedsam's *(1954)* effort nearly half a century ago, when he explored the depiction of bureaucrats as heroes in American literature. To do so, it is important to adopt several stringent criteria that define who is and who is not a bureaucratic movie hero.

First, the film must focus on an administrator rather than a direct-service employee. Many movies depict a public employee hero delivering a socially approved service. For example, Richard Widmark in **Panic in the Streets** (released in 1950) is a public health service officer seeking to prevent the spread of an epidemic. Al Pacino is a straight-arrow cop in **Serpico** (released in 1973) who battles corruption. Robert De Niro heads the arson squad for the Chicago Fire Department and is relentless in finding the causes of suspicious fires in **Backdraft** (released in 1991). In

Cliffhanger (released in 1993), Sylvester Stallone is a National Park Service ranger battling terrorists *(Larkin, 1993, p. 95)*. Tom Hanks is a NASA astronaut who pilots the **Apollo 13** (released in 1995) mission through near disaster to safety. While these movies portray a positive image of the public servant, they are silent (at best) on the role of the supervisor of that service deliverer, the administrator or bureaucrat. To qualify, a movie needs to acclaim the public administrator, not a front-line deliverer of a service. This sets the bar quite high.

Second, the movie must be about administration and management, not about leadership. This eliminates movies about the high-ranking people in the military such as George C. Scott as **Patton** (released in 1970) or submarine officer Denzel Washington in **Crimson Tide** (released in 1995). While one might argue that these are examples of managers working within a system, the focus of those movies is on the leadership role of these officers in times of war or military crisis, not on their everyday decision-making. As with the previous category of public employee service deliverers, this criterion limits the qualifying movies to those that depict positively a public manager whose normal everyday activity is the work of bureaucracy, such as going to meetings, writing memos, approving documents and administering large organizations.

Third, the movie must portray the bureaucrat in a central role, either as a leading character or as one crucial to the story. This criterion eliminates movies that depict a bureaucrat in a positive light, but whose role in the movie is minor or tangential. The public administrator needs to be in a primary rather than incidental role.

Finally, the act of heroism in the movie preferably involves taking an administrative action rather than engaging in direct action, the latter typified by stock situations such as saving a drowning child. To meet this criterion, the hero ideally, but not always, is exercising the discretion that is inherent in the act of management. For example, he or she might approve a controversial memo, issue an unpopular policy, refuse to permit an irregularity in a standard operating procedure or engage in some other of the routine activities of a public manager. In doing so, the government administrator has placed himself or herself in a dangerous or heroic posture. These heroes have used their administrative discretion for admirable and noble purposes, irrespective of popularity, consequences or personal danger.

The identification of movies that met these criteria was difficult. In general, the normal academic research methodology that begins with a

search of source books and databases was not fruitful. Miller identified a similar methodological barrier, concluding that "reference sources…or library catalogs are of little assistance in locating practitioner characters" *(1999, p. 5)*. While there are published comprehensive compilations of movies, they were not helpful. For example, a reference book dedicated to identifying movies by themes and settings did not contain a category relevant to this research among its 450+ subject headings *(Armstrong and Armstrong, 1990)*. While the American Film Institute has issued exhaustive compilations of American movies by decade, the subject headings in each index could not lead to the identification of movies for this review because virtually every movie has a hero or heroine and the public administration context of a scene is often not noted in each movie summary, upon which the index is based *(Hanson, 1999; Hanson, 1993; Hanson, 1988; Krafsur, 1976; Munden, 1971)*. Similarly, an internet database that permits searches by subject did not yield any desirable results *(IMDb, 2001)*.

Instead the authors initially began with a list compiled by Holzer about movies and television programs that generally related to public administration or management *(Holzer, 1991)*. In addition, the authors relied on the process used by Miller *(1999, p. 5)* which included such exploratory and horizon scanning search methodologies as personal contact with colleagues and students, internet searches and television listings. Then, every effort was made to obtain a copy of the movie for viewing. The authors were able to view all but three of the movies described below.

These research methods yielded the identification of 20 movies that met the four criteria described above. They are listed in order of the year of release. While much writing about film focuses attention on the centrality of actors and directors *(Goldman, 2000, pp. 150-51)* or even on editors *(Rosenblum and Karen, 1979)*, it is equally important to focus on the screenwriters and the original literary sources of the work. The writers create the characters and the plot of the story. They, especially, determine whether the bureaucrat is a good guy or a bad guy. Therefore, the listing of films below gives equal attention to the writers as well as the original source of the screenplay, if it had not been written originally for film.

The primary source for the basic information about each movie (release year, director, screenwriter, key actors) was obtained from the Internet Movie Database *(IMDb, 2001)*. Supplemental sources included Pym *(1998)*, Maltin *(1998)* and Scheuer *(1991)*.

Bureaucratic Heroes: Movies in English

A Bell for Adano (released in 1945). Directed by Henry King. Screenplay by Lamar Trotti and Norman Reilly Raine. Original literary source: novel by John Hersey *(1944)*.

US Army Major Joppolo (John Hodiak) is a civil government administration officer assigned to restore government in a small town in Italy at the end of World War II. He grows to understand that public administration is more than the delivery of services. It also, he discovers, is the fulfillment of the non-tangible needs of the citizenry as well. In this case, before the war the town had had a bell whose ringing provided the markers for the routines and cycles of daily life. Joppolo realizes the importance of reinstalling a bell as a symbol of the restoration of peacetime life in the town. He struggles, successfully, to locate and then obtain a bell from a US Navy ship. Thanks to him, the town is able to return to its antebellum state.

1984 (released in 1956). Directed by Michael Anderson. Screenplay by Ralph Gilbert Bettinson and William P. Templeton *(1956)*. **Nineteen Eighty-Four** (released in 1984). Directed and written by Michael Radford. Original literary source for both movies: novel by George Orwell *(1949)*.

Bureaucrat Winston Smith (Edmond O'Brien in the 1956 release, John Hurt in the 1984 version) works for a state agency that rewrites newspaper archives to alter history. This is to assure that the regime is never put in a bad light, such as not attaining a production quota or erasing the hateful characterization of another country that had been a war-time enemy and is now, suddenly, a war-time ally. "Lie becomes truth and then becomes a lie again," he says (in the 1984 version).

The regime maintains 'thought police' to capture citizens who engage in 'thought crimes,' such as remembering and repeating the now-banned old news. When he can no longer stomach the lies that he routinely prepares, he also begins thinking 'criminal' thoughts, such as "There is truth and there is untruth. Freedom is the freedom to say 2+2=4. If that is granted, all else follows." After falling in love with a like-minded woman, he decides to risk all by engaging in personal behavior that violates the laws of the regime and is considered traitorous. However, he is discovered and arrested. Like others who have been caught, he is unable to resist the torture he is subjected to and in the end is brainwashed back into passive submission. In this case, the bureaucrat is not a hero for overt actions he

takes in his working capacity, but rather for daring to think and articulate thoughts that have been criminalized by the bureaucracy and willing to face the consequences of doing this.

Hence, the two versions of this movie and **Brazil** (see below) belong not only on a list of bureaucratic heroes, but also on a list of tyrannical bureaucracy movies as well. In these cases, the bad bureaucracy wins out in the end over the hero.

Esther and the King (released in 1960). Directed by Raoul Walsh. Screenplay by Raoul Walsh and Michael Elkins. Original literary source: story in the Hebrew Bible *(JPS, 1999, pp. 1785-801)*.

The Emperor of Persia (Richard Egan) appointed two senior administrators to run the day-to-day affairs of the Empire while he was away on a military campaign. Lord Mordecai (Denis O'Dea) is an ethical administrator, while First Minister Haman is corrupt and ambitious. Mordecai refuses to fight evil with evil and continues to oversee the financial affairs of the empire honestly. With the return of the emperor, Haman hatches a plot to gain power, even depose him. He falsely charges Mordecai with malfeasance. The punishment Mordecai faces is execution. Nonetheless, Mordecai persists in maintaining ethical conduct, based on the tenets of his Jewish faith. Finally, Haman is exposed and hanged while Mordecai is rehabilitated and restored to his high administrative post.

At one point in the movie, the Emperor describes Mordecai's work as the epitome of good public administration in a monarchy: "The eye of the king, my keeper of the accounts, my all-knowing minister."

To Kill a Mockingbird (released in 1962). Directed by Robert Mulligan. Screenplay by Horton Foote *(1963)*. Original literary source: novel by Harper Lee *(1960)*.

Although Atticus Finch (Gregory Peck) is the star of this movie, Sheriff Heck Tate (Frank Overton) plays a key role. Finch, a lawyer in rural Macomb County, Alabama in the 1930's, defends a black man falsely charged with raping a white girl. Although the man is convicted, during the trial Finch successfully points to Bob Ewell, the girl's father, as the perpetrator of the clearly false accusation. In fact, Ewell probably had beaten the daughter when drunk and then sought to cover up her injuries with the rape charge. Seething from the humiliation he received from Finch's cross-examination at the trial, Ewell seeks revenge. He attacks Finch's son and tries to stab him to death. A reclusive adult neighbor, with

developmental disabilities that give him the mentality of a child, suddenly intervenes, saves the boy and stabs Ewell to death.

When hearing what happened, Finch assumes that Sheriff Heck Tate (Frank Overton) will charge the neighbor with the killing. As sheriff, Tate is simultaneously a law enforcement officer and administrator of a law enforcement agency. These two roles have now come in to conflict. As a law enforcement officer he is aware of a crime and has a standard operating procedure to follow regarding a suspect. Yet, as a manager of a law enforcement agency, he can envision the unintended consequences of such routinized action. Tate decides to exercise the administrative discretion he has, to the point of violating his duty as a law enforcement officer. He responds to Finch that he will not charge the neighbor and will not include what actually happened in his report:

> Bob Ewell fell on his knife. He killed himself. There's a black man dead for no reason, and now the man responsible for it is dead. Let the dead bury the dead this time, Mr. Finch. I never heard tell it was against the law for any citizen to do his utmost to prevent a crime from being committed, which is exactly what he did. But maybe you'll tell me it's my duty to tell the town all about it, not to hush it up...To my way of thinkin', takin' one man who's done you and this town a big service, and draggin' him, with his shy ways, into the limelight, to me, that's a sin. It's a sin, and I'm not about to have it on my head. I may not be much, Mr. Finch, but I'm still Sheriff of Macomb County, and Bob Ewell fell on his knife. Good night sir.

He will file a false report because he believes that accomplishes the most ethical and just result.

The Hill (released in 1965). Directed by Sidney Lumet. Screenplay by Ray Rigby. Original literary source: play by Ray Rigby and Ray S. Allen. Rigby also wrote a novelization of the movie *(1965)* and then a sequel *(1981)*.

During World War II, British soldiers who had been captured after going AWOL, caught trading in the black market or committing other crimes are incarcerated in a British military prison in the North African desert. “It’s a brutal place, filled with sadistic punishments that are meant to break the spirit of anyone” *(Lumet, 1995, pp. 83-4)*. The commandant of the institution is weak-willed, inattentive and diffident. The prison’s noncommissioned officer (NCO), Sergeant Major Bert Wilson (Harry Andrews) is actually in charge. “The Commandant signs bits of paper. He’d

sign his own death warrant if I handed to him. But I run this place," he cockily says to one of his subordinates.

According to British Army rules (referred to in the movie as "KRs," the King's Regulations for the Army and the Army Reserves *[Towell, 1988, p. 1649]*), the medical officer (MO) has the authority to supercede the usual chain of command and countermand any order directed at a prisoner, if he decides that order would endanger the prisoner's health. Despite his good intentions, the MO at this prison (Michael Redgrave) is an indecisive person who is easily intimidated by Wilson. He is ineffectual at protecting the prisoners who are being abused. (In the script, he is nameless, listed in the credits only as The Medical Officer.)

When events come to a breaking point, the only prisoner with NCO rank, Sergeant Major Joe Roberts (Sean Connery) makes an emotional appeal to the MO to intervene. As always, the doctor reacts sympathetically. He declares Roberts and his two cellmates in need of medical treatment and puts them under his protection. He orders that the two prisoners be transferred from their cell to his infirmary and Roberts to the hospital.

Wilson and his most sadistic subordinate, Williams, appear on the scene. They put enormous psychological and emotional pressure on the doctor to reverse his order. They say that malingering prisoners always fake their medical condition to manipulate him. The doctor's intervention would destroy the basic discipline of the prison, they hector him. This tactic has always worked in the past. In previous situations like this, every time the MO would then back down. "Don't try to counteract my orders," Wilson bellows at the doctor. For the first time, the MO summons his courage and responds in an unprecedented firm tone, "I have the final word when the men's health is concerned." He refuses to back down. He insists on exercising his administrative authority under the KRs. Wilson is stunned by the doctor's use of Army rules to negate the power that he thought only he had. Realizing that he no longer "run[s] this place" exclusively, Wilson departs bewildered and deflated.

The film continues with the prisoners undoing the MO's heroism by brutally attacking Williams when left alone with him. This final outcome, however, does not negate the bureaucratic courage of the MO.

The Russians Are Coming, The Russians Are Coming (released in 1966). Directed by Norman Jewison. Screenplay by William Rose. Original literary source: novel by Nathaniel Benchley *(1961)*.

In the midst of the Cold War, a submarine from the Soviet Union ventures too close to a New England island and runs aground. It sends a landing party ashore to seize a boat that would be powerful enough to pull the sub off the sand bar it is stranded on. When the first reports of the presence of the landing party circulate around the island, the residents shift between panic and amateur militarism. Police Chief Link Mattocks (Brian Keith) is the only one with a cool head and level perspective. His phlegmatic reaction calms both the nervous officers in his department and trigger-happy veterans on the island who are eager for action.

Mattocks does not need to prove anything. He exercises his administrative discretion as police chief to avoid hasty action, insists on collecting reliable information and makes staff assignments that reflected need, not appearance. To a panicking crowd of armed civilians, he said, "Anybody seen 'em?…Well, speak up. Anyone actually see any Russians? Everybody go on home, just get off the streets."

Mattocks also treats the Russians with calm and reason. After the Russian sub is freed by a rising tide, the captain steers the ship into the harbor in search of the men he had sent ashore. The captain mistakenly believes that the landing party has been taken prisoner. He threatens to begin shelling the town unless the men are released. Rather than reacting in kind and threatening a similarly violent response, Mattocks maintains his unruffled professional demeanor and behaves according to his time-tested standard operating procedure. He says to the interpreter, "Alright, you tell the captain he is under arrest. Let's have your name and address."

Instead of doing what is popular and expected of him, the police chief tries to solve problems by de-escalation of emotional situations. His approach to management is to act only after getting all the facts and being restrained in the exercise of government power. While an understandable and natural reaction might be to match threat with counter-threat and violence with counter-violence, he uses his administrative rank to avoid exercising his powers to sanction. Lack of action is more effective and powerful than invoking the compulsory powers of the state. He is a hero because he would rather look like a fool than exercise his discretionary power unwisely.

Bullitt (released in 1968). Directed by Peter Yates. Screenplay by Alan R. Trustman and Harry Kleiner. Original literary source: novel by Robert L. Pike *(1963)*.

Detective Lieutenant Frank Bullitt (Steve McQueen) is the head of a

special unit of the San Francisco Police Department. His team has been given the assignment of guarding a member of the mob who is willing to expose the inner workings of organized crime by testifying at a public hearing of a Senate Subcommittee in San Francisco. The testimony of this star witness is expected to be a major news story. Walter Chalmers (Robert Vaughn), a rich and influential citizen who is planning to run for elected office, has arranged for this witness to come forward and expects to benefit politically from the appearance. Bullitt's team is directed to go to a secret location at a downtown hotel to 'baby-sit' the witness for the weekend, with Bullitt assigning shifts to the team members. Since he is not part of the first shift, Bullitt leaves. While he is away, intruders burst into the room and shoot the witness, notwithstanding the efforts of Bullitt's team member to protect him. The witness undergoes emergency surgery at a hospital in a desperate effort to save his life. Bullitt's supervisor, Captain Sam Bennett (Simon Oakland), arrives at the hospital to confer with Bullitt. Bennett knows that the repercussions of this failure to protect the witness could ruin Bullitt's career and perhaps his own, as well. He says to Bullitt, "I'll try to back you up." Later, the witness dies in the hospital, but Bullitt decides to keep the death a secret. He hopes that a false perception that the witness survived the shooting might make it easier to track down the source of the security leak and the assassins.

The next morning, Chalmers intercepts Bennett, just as he and his family are about to enter church for Sunday services. He pressures Bennett to order Bullitt to reveal the location of the missing witness, who he thinks is still alive. Chalmers suggests that Bennett's career would benefit from his political influence if Bennett would cooperate. Bennett responds in a flat monotone, "I've given him complete charge of the case" and then excuses himself to enter the church.

Later that day, in a showdown at police headquarters, Bullitt hands Bennett his written report. Captain Baker (Norman Fell), an ally of Chalmers within the department, demands to know the location of the witness. Bullitt informs both, for the first time, that the witness is dead. Baker demands that Bennett immediately punish Bullitt. Bennett knows that Baker is voicing the views of the departmental leadership, the city's politicians and Chalmers. He says without any inflection, "This is Sunday. I'm going to hold that written [report] till we come to work on Monday." This seemingly mundane observation is Bennett's way of maneuvering within the bureaucracy to protect his underling and give him as much time as he can so that Bullitt can accomplish his goals. Baker stomps out of the

room and then orders departmental staff not to provide any assistance to Bullitt while he continues his investigation. Bullitt knows what a courageous decision Bennett has just made. He has been given 24 more hours to work the case before everything will come crashing down on him, and -- because of what Bennett has just decided -- on Bennett as well.

Jaws (released in 1975). Directed by Steven Spielberg. Screenplay by Peter Benchley and Carl Gottlieb; also Howard Sackler and Peter Milius (uncredited). Original literary source: novel by Peter Benchley *(1974)*.

Martin Brody (Roy Scheider) is the police chief of the town of Amity. He likes the quiet and uneventful life of a small town police chief compared to his earlier career as a cop in New York City. He is content with a low-key job of managing a small department. Yet, when a shark threatens the safety of swimmers, the political and commercial leaders of the town do not want Brody to order a closing of the beaches because of the economic effect it would have on tourism. At first, he "lets others shape his decisions" *(Gottlieb, 1975, p. 69)*.

Later he insists on exercising his discretionary powers to close the beaches, although he is not even sure he actually has the specific legal power to do so. He says, "I can do anything, I'm the chief of police." That statement exemplifies the reality that a large degree of discretion is delegated to every major public manager, but especially so in law enforcement. Finally, when nothing else works, he bullies the mayor – theoretically his boss -- into signing a document so that Brody can hire an expert fisherman to kill the shark:

> You're gonna do what you do best. You're going to sign this voucher so I can hire a contractor...You're gonna do the right thing. That's why you're gonna sign this and we're gonna pay that guy what he wants. Sign it, Larry!

Brody will no longer bend to the wishes of the elected officials. He exercises his authority to protect the public, including unorthodox approaches to accomplishing his goal of killing the shark.

All the President's Men (released in 1976). Directed by Alan J. Pakula. Screenplay by James Goldman *(1997, pp. 227-338)*. Original literary source: book by Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward *(1974)*.

In their effort to expose the Watergate cover-up, Washington Post reporters Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward repeatedly hit dead-ends and might fail. Two high-ranking bureaucrats, who disagree with the White

House's effort to stymie the FBI's investigation, agree to serve as anonymous sources. The one most remembered is Woodward's source, dubbed 'Deep Throat' (Hal Holbrook). He keeps their expose reporting alive with advice on what direction the reporters should go. He is obviously a very high ranking administrator, since he is familiar with the details of the FBI's investigation, the Justice Department's handling of the case and the White House's interactions with the investigation. Deep Throat is putting his job in jeopardy by even talking to Woodward. The Nixon White House would certainly fire him if he were exposed and would probably also engage in character assassination in an effort to impugn his credibility as a source. Nonetheless, he continues to meet with them to assure that the cover-up will not succeed.

The second heroic bureaucrat in the story is usually overshadowed by Deep Throat and often forgotten. Nonetheless, Bernstein has a source in the FBI, who in the movie is only called Joe (Jess Osuna). Like Deep Throat, Joe is unhappy with how the FBI has been manipulated to prevent a full and free investigation of all possible crimes related to Watergate. While extremely worried about keeping his job, he tries his best to help the reporters. Both Joe and Deep Throat are courageous bureaucrats who believe in the rule of law and the Constitution.

Brubaker (released in 1980). Directed by Stuart Rosenberg. Screenplay by W. D. Richter. Story by W. D. Richter and Arthur Ross. Original literary source: book by Thomas O. Murton and Joe Hyams *(1970)*.

Henry Brubaker (Robert Redford) is hired as warden of an Arkansas prison farm to implement reforms in the institution. He begins his tenure by disguising himself as a prisoner in order to observe the rumored abuses. After a few weeks, he reveals himself and begins instituting major reforms in the operation of the prison. In the process of doing so, he uncovers corruption and insider dealing that victimize the prisoners, denying them adequate food, shelter and medical care. The culprits extend throughout the local and state power structure, including a powerful local state senator and the governor.

In the climactic scene, Brubaker is asked to discontinue searching for the graves of prisoners who had been brutally murdered and then covertly buried in an unmarked area of the prison farm. The establishment does not want to be embarrassed by a public scandal that reveals their acquiescence to these crimes and their cover-up. He is told that if he ceases to pursue the exhumations, he will receive all the funding for the

improvements he had been begging for and denied: a rebuilt prison, better medical facilities, better farming equipment, a new heating system. In a final showdown with his boss, both articulate their opposing worldviews. In an exchange that has a tone of more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger, he states his moral code as an administrator:

> Superior: And you don't see any other options? No middle ground?
>
> Brubaker: No, I don't see playing politics with the truth.
>
> Superior: No way to compromise?
>
> Brubaker: Oh, on strategy, maybe. But not on principle.

He refuses to compromise and is fired.

Interestingly, two of the standard movie directories criticize, rather than applaud, Brubaker's administrative morality. According to Pym, although Brubaker is "all gritty integrity and inner resolve," because of the "attribution of every evil to simple human greed, the melodrama remains hamfisted" *(Pym, 1998, p. 118)*. Scheuer condemns Brubaker for "torpedo[ing] his own efforts for the sake of an obscure moral principle" (*Scheuer, 1991, p. 136)*. Thus, this movie highlights an ethical dilemma experienced by many public administrators, namely whether the ends justifies the means.

Absence of Malice (released in 1981). Directed by Sidney Pollack. Screenplay by Kurt Luedtke and David Rayfiel (uncredited). Novelization by Kerry Stewart *(1981)*.

In Miami, out-of-control federal prosecutors and law enforcement officials have been trying to build a case against a suspected crime boss. Acting illegally, they wiretapped an innocent citizen who they thought might be helpful in their investigation. In an effort to compel him to cooperate, they also leaked incriminating and false information to an eager, willing and gullible reporter.

James J. Wells (Wilford Brimley), Assistant Attorney General for the Organized Crime Division of the US Department of Justice, descends on Miami to clean up the legal and public relations mess they have created. He brings the key players together to get to the bottom of the imbroglio. After hearing their rationalizations, Wells criticizes their conduct and "delivers an unforgettable lecture to overreaching government employees" *(Ortega-Liston, 2000, p. 7)*. He condemns the head of the organized crime strike force, telling him, "we can't have people go around leaking stuff for their own reasons. It ain't legal. And worse than that, it ain't right." He publicly censures the local US Attorney, saying, "he's a nice guy. He just forgot

about the rules." Regarding the wiretaps that the FBI had installed without court authorization, Wells chastises the strike force prosecutor, telling him that the FBI agent "don't get paid to act on your instructions. He gets paid to abide by and to enforce the law." Wells wraps up his inquiry by firing the federal strike force prosecutor. He wants to do the same to the US Attorney. However, because the US Attorney is a federal office holder who has been nominated by the president and confirmed by the Senate, Wells cannot fire him. Instead, he tells him as forcefully as possible that he should resign immediately.

Wells also knows that he is accountable to the public-at-large for what has happened. Since government managers have violated the public trust, Wells knows he must report to the citizenry about the matter. He prepares a detailed public statement. He is not reluctant to describe this entire incident fully and honestly, even though it will greatly embarrass the Department. Rather, he is so committed to the values of legality and professionalism that he proceeds unhesitatingly, regardless of the consequences. In this final compelling scene, Wells "emerges as a highly ethical public administrator" *(Ortega-Liston, 2000, p. 7)*.

2010, a.k.a. **2010: The Year We Make Contact** (released in 1984). Directed and written by Peter Hyams. Original literary source: novel by Arthur C. Clarke *(1982)*.

This is a sequel to **2001** *(Clarke, 1968)*. In that movie, Dr. Heywood Floyd was the Chairman of the National Council on Astronautics. He had approved a dangerous mission even though "he had had qualms; his views as a scientist had conflicted with his duties as a bureaucrat…In the final analysis he had approved the plans for the Jupiter Mission and supervised their execution" *(Clarke, 1982, pp. 16-7)*. The mission ended disastrously, with four crewmembers dead, the fifth disappearing mysteriously and the empty spaceship, Discovery, circling Jupiter in permanent orbit.

At the beginning of **2010**, two colleagues have separate conversations with Floyd (Roy Scheider) on how the fallout from the mission had wrecked his bureaucratic career. His successor reassures him, "I'm not the one who forced you out. I didn't blame the whole thing on you." Nevertheless, his Russian counterpart summarizes the logic and inevitable choreography that follows such fiascoes; "You were responsible for the Discovery Mission. It was a failure. Someone to be blamed. So, it was you."

Yet, Floyd does not consider himself a scapegoat. He fully accepts responsibility for what happened. When a follow-up mission to investigate what happened is being planned, he says plainly, “We lost some good men up there. And I sent them. I have to go” (emphasis in dialogue). Later, his wife tries to dissuade him:

> This won’t bring back those men. You’ve been punishing yourself for years for something you thought you did wrong or didn’t do right. And now you’re looking for absolution. You know, you could get yourself killed.

In a way that a movie cannot, his thoughts and feelings are spelled out in the novel. “Curiosity, guilt, the determination to finish a job that had been badly botched – they all combined to drive him toward Jupiter and whatever might be waiting there” *(Clarke, 1982, p. 30)*.

Floyd demonstrates his bureaucratic heroism by going on a mission similar to the first one. He is willing to risk his life, given that he had asked others to do the same. He demonstrates his leadership and courage through his behavior. He will not rest until the cause of the 2001 fiasco is determined. He is willing to pursue this goal irrespective of the personal danger involved and the absence of any legal obligation to do so.

Brazil (released in 1985). Directed by Terry Gilliam. Screenplay by Terry Gilliam, Charles McKeown and Tom Stoppard *(Mathews, 1998, pp. 183-338)*.

This movie depicts the classic negative image in popular culture of bureaucracy *(Zinke, 2000)*. In a hellish retro-futuristic world, the all-powerful state bureaucracy makes a mistake, something that supposedly never happens and which disrupts the smooth flow of paperwork. A promising mid-level bureaucrat, Sam Lowry (Jonathan Pryce), tries to rectify the mistake and while doing so falls in love with an anti-state activist. He risks his job as he maneuvers within the bureaucracy to help the family of the mistaken victim as well as his romantic interest. Eventually, he is caught and accused of such crimes as “bringing into disrepute the good name of the government…and wasting Ministry time and paper” *(Mathews, 1998, p. 324)*.

Like **1984**, this film simultaneously condemns bureaucracy while glorifying a bureaucratic hero.

The Hunt for Red October (released in 1990). Directed by John McTiernan. Screenplay by Larry Ferguson and Donald Stewart. Original

literary source: novel by Tom Clancy *(1984)*. **Patriot Games** (released in 1992). Directed by Phillip Noyce. Screenplay by W. Peter Iliff and Donald Stewart. Original literary source: novel by Tom Clancy *(1987)*. **Clear and Present Danger** (released in 1994). Directed by Phillip Noyce. Screenplay by John Milius, Donald Stewart and Steven Zaillian. Original literary source: novel by Tom Clancy *(1989)*.

Admiral James Greer (James Earl Jones) is the Director of the CIA. He understands the vicious games that Washington's politicos play. Over the years of his own career, he has seen people advance themselves and their policy goals though underhanded and subtle tactics that set others up for the fall in case of failure. He uses his experience and bureaucratic rank to advise and protect his protégé, Jack Ryan (played by Alec Baldwin in the 1990 release and by Harrison Ford in the 1992 and 1994 releases). Greer's mentoring permits Ryan to accomplish his various missions and prevents others from derailing him.

When the viewer is first introduced to the two characters in **The Hunt for Red October**, Greer maneuvers to have Ryan be the CIA briefer at a meeting in the White House situation room. Before the briefing, he gives Ryan advice, based on his own experience with the President's National Security Advisor. "He's liable to ask some direct questions. Give him direct answers. Tell him what you think." During the briefing, Ryan gets into an argument with an Army general, apparently the Army's Chief of Staff. Greer, who is seated at the large conference room's table to Ryan's left, unobtrusively puts his right hand over Ryan's left, giving him a silent signal that it would be advisable to back off. In just this first exposure to Greer, the viewer is already left with a favorable impression of a senior bureaucrat who is unselfishly helping the movie's hero.

In **Patriot Games**, Ryan hesitates to give the signal to start a counter-terrorist raid on a terrorist training camp in the Libyan Desert. He tells Greer that he is not "absolutely certain" that the Irish terrorist the CIA is seeking is indeed the same person who was seen at the camp on a fuzzy satellite photo. Greer responds in both a mentoring and protective way. First, he schools him in governmental decision-making and risk-taking. He says to Ryan, "Tell me one thing in life that is absolutely for certain…What I need to hear from you is your best guess. And I think I've heard it. Haven't I?"

Paralleling Simon's prescription for administrative decision-making *(Simon, 1997)*, for Greer perfect information is not a reasonable goal. Instead, satsificing is the necessary standard for making decisions,

including important and serious ones. Second, the subtext of Greer's comment is that as CIA Director, he will stand behind a decision that Ryan cannot guarantee is absolutely correct. If Ryan is wrong, then Greer will protect him because the decision that was taken was based on the best possible information given the circumstances. This stance is the opposite of the image of a bureaucrat who maneuvers to disclaim responsibility for failures. Greer is not a CYA ('cover your ass') boss. Instead, he is courageous by being willing to take the blame if a risky decision does not turn out well.

In **Clear and Present Danger**, the third movie of the series, Greer, knowing he is dying of pancreatic cancer, hurries to finish Ryan's apprenticeship and tries his best to continue helping him with advice and mentoring to the very last. While working in the CIA headquarters, he summons Ryan and gives him an assignment that will entail working with the White House. He cautions Ryan to "be discreet." Soon after, now hospitalized, he gives Ryan more advice: "Want to know about politics in Washington? Four words: 'watch your back, Jack.'" A few weeks later, his health steadily deteriorating, he chides Ryan from his hospital bed after the President had given Ryan a questionable assignment:

> Greer (laughing): I leave you alone for two weeks and you walk straight into a big bear trap.
>
> Ryan: I don't know what I was thinking.
>
> Greer: You were thinking about impressing the President of the United States and you shouldn't do that.

For Greer, professionalism and ethics are more important than pleasing a president. He also gives Ryan a 'heads up' about one of the senior executives in the CIA: "Watch him like a hawk."

Then, in a final deathbed scene, Greer sums up the values that guided his public service career. He talks about the meaning of loyalty in public administration:

> You took an oath, if you recall, when you first came to work for me. And I don't mean to the National Security Advisor of the United States. I mean to his boss and I don't mean the President. You gave your word to his boss. You gave your word to the people of the United States. Your word is who you are.

His message is clear. A heroic bureaucrat does not always blindly follow orders. Sometimes he or she must be loyal to higher values even if that means saying no to the President.

The Postman (released in 1997). Directed by Kevin Costner. Screenplay by Eric Roth and Brian Helgeland. Original literary source: novel by David Brin *(1985)*.

In a post-apocalyptic world, Kevin Costner tries to survive amid anarchy. He seeks to obtain scarce food and shelter by pretending to be a letter carrier. As the plot unfolds, he realizes the centrality of mail service to organized society. Costner's character (who is unnamed in the screenplay) gradually shifts from hustler and con man into a real postmaster. He works to reestablish, organize and direct the US Postal Service throughout the devastated region. When addressing the youth who volunteered to work with him to deliver the mail, he tells them that because of their public service "you beat back despair and replaced it with hope."

The film provides a tangible example of how the organized delivery of public services is the essence of modern society. Public administration brings order out of chaos. It is civilization. In fact, the movie's plot unknowingly reflects actual events. During the Civil War, whenever Grant's army occupied a new part of the Confederacy, mail delivery was in the very first set of public services that he insisted be restored as soon as possible *(Simpson, 2000, p. 144)*.

Bureaucratic Heroes: Foreign Language Movies

Ikiru (a.k.a. **Doomed** or **Living** or **To Live**) (released in 1952). Directed by Akira Kurosawa. Screenplay by Akira Kurosawa *(1992, pp. 3-47)*, Hideo Oguni and Shinobu Hashimoto.

A Japanese bureaucrat (Takashi Shimura) has worked nearly 30 years in an office where "he sits behind a desk piled high with paper…busy putting his seal to various documents" *(Kurosawa, 1992, p. 9)*. After learning that he has a fatal illness, he decides that a petition from a poor neighborhood for a park should be acted on, rather than simply stamped and forwarded to another department in a normal endless bureaucratic runaround. "Against official indifference, active discouragement, even intimidation, he forces the park into being" *(Richie, 1992, p. 4)*. When the park is completed, he feels, finally, that for once he has used the bureaucracy to accomplish something concrete that serves the citizens. He dies shortly thereafter. This is "a moral existentialist drama about the loneliness of the long-distance bureaucrat who finds redemption by helping victims of bureaucratic indifference" *(Bernstein, 2000)*.

Sansho the Bailiff (a.k.a. **The Bailiff**) (released in 1954). Directed by Kenji Mizoguchi. Screenplay by Yahiro Fuji and Yoshikata Yoda (1979). Original literary source: short story 'Sansh¯o the Steward' by ¯Ogai Mori *(1977, pp. 125-48)*, derived from an early Buddhist tale and medieval Japanese puppet play.

In medieval Japan, an honest and popular district Governor is removed from office because he opposes a policy of the central government that it would unduly burden the citizens in his administrative region. His son (Yoshaiki Hanayagi) survives the disgrace of having a deposed father, the cruelty of society and the anarchy of the times. He eventually becomes a district governor as well. When faced with the choice of maintaining his high administrative position or doing what is right and losing office, he – like his father -- chooses the latter. He promulgates an order that emancipates the slave laborers in his district and then is promptly removed from office. However, by the time he is deposed the slaves have already been manumitted and the status quo ante cannot be restored.

Summary and Conclusions

Of about 24,000 movies in general circulation *(Connors and Craddock, 2000)*, this list consists of 20 films that have a bureaucratic hero. This is an infinitesimal number, so miniscule that a statistician would probably consider it as equal to zero in relation to the size of its universe. With such a minute number of films in such a large corpus, their existence could be explained away as an insignificant random variation.

Nonetheless, this short list of films seems to bear unusual distinction. It includes some of the best known and respected actors and directors. In terms of top '100 lists,' five of the movies identified in the article are highly regarded. Sansho was listed on the 'Centenary Top One Hundred' movies, based on a poll of directors, actors, programmers and critics *(Pym, 1998, p. xv)*. Mockingbird was ranked 34th and Jaws 48th of America's 100 greatest movies, compiled by a panel of leaders from across the film community for the American Film Institute *(1998)*. Using the same polling method three years later, the Institute's list of top 100 thrillers included Jaws (#2), Bullitt (#36) and All the President's Men (#57) *(American Film Institute, 2001)*. Of these 20 films, eleven were nominated for Oscars and five were Oscar winners *(Academy, 2001)*. (See also Endnote.) In other long-standing and established award competitions, these

20 films garnered four awards from the British Academy of Film and Television Arts and 36 other nominations. For the Golden Globe awards, they won eight and received 11 other nominations. From the perspective of the box office, in 2001 Jaws was the 7th highest grossing movie of all time, as adjusted for inflation *(Mr. Showbiz, 2001)*. Therefore, despite its brevity, the list itself is above average in quality.

This list of films with hero bureaucrats uncovers several themes or common traits. First, all are men. This undoubtedly reflects both the culture of Hollywood, which until recently had few roles of substance for women, and the culture of public bureaucracy, which also has been bereft of many female role models.

Second, the number of bureaucrat heroes who wear uniforms is striking. Of the 18 movies in English, eleven have bureaucrat heroes who are either in criminal justice or military careers. This may reflect our willingness as a culture to ascribe greater decision-making authority to anyone wearing a uniform.

Third, although these bureaucrats are heroes, their bureaucracies rarely are. Hollywood films tend to be about "an individual character who wants something desirable, who is initially kept by outside forces from getting what he/she wants, but who, through luck and determination, achieves the goal in the end" *(Sikov, 1994)*. In large part, the distinction between administrator hero films and other cinematic works is merely that the hero lives inside the bureaucracy against which he is fighting. The co-authors have been unable, so far, to identify a movie depicting an entire agency of bureaucrats acting heroically; i.e. engaging in a behavior outside the bounds of expected routines and accepted practices.

We expect that not only cineastes will be interested in this modest film collection. Movies are often used in public administration education *(Zinke, 2000; Jurkiewicz and Giacalone, 2000; Champoux, 1999; Drucker, 1999; Chandler and Adams, 1997)*. While it is relatively easy to find stereotypical and negative examples of public management, this article identifies for the pedagogue a counterpart list of positive depictions of civil servants who are truly heroic. Educators considering using any of the movies for classroom purposes are encouraged to consult with the many popular movie guides to learn more about each movie and to decide for themselves whether or not to use a particular movie as an instructional tool.

These, then, are the Hollywood crumbs with which public administrationists can proudly identify themselves. Given the anti-government culture of the American revolution, US popular culture and the

common themes of the emerging global culture, it is heartening to find high-quality films on this list, although the list is brief. It is also regrettable but realistic to assume that few additions will be made to this meager list in the future.

Interactive Invitation to Readers

Notwithstanding the best efforts of the co-authors, presumably this movie list has inadvertently omitted some other films that qualify as featuring a bureaucratic hero. Readers are invited to submit nominations to the co-authors for additions to this list:

Mordecai Lee: mordecai@uwm.edu
Susan C Paddock: spaddock@dcs.wisc.edu

Please adhere to the criteria used in the article: (a) a film about an administrator rather than a direct-service employee; (b) a film about management rather than leadership; (c) a film with the administrator in a central or crucial role; and (d) a film where the heroic act is administrative. In addition, the movie must be in relatively broad release, i.e. is listed in widely used popular guides to movies on video.

Endnote

Nominations for Oscars of the movies listed in the article:

1963: **To Kill a Mockingbird**: best picture, actor (won), supporting actress, director, art direction -- black and white (won), screenplay based on material from another source (won), cinematography -- black and white and musical score substantially original

1967: **The Russians Are Coming, the Russians Are Coming**: best picture, actor, film editing and screenplay based on material from another source

1969: **Bullitt**: film editing (won) and sound

1976: **Jaws**: best picture, film editing (won), music – original score (won) and sound (won)

1977: **All the President's Men**: best picture, supporting actor (won), supporting actress, directing, art direction (won), film editing, set decoration (won), sound (won) and screenplay based on material from another source (won)

1981: **Brubaker**: best screenplay written directly for the screen.

1982: **Absence of Malice**: leading actor, supporting actress and original screenplay

1985: **2010**: art direction, costume design, makeup, set decoration, sound and visual effects

1986: **Brazil**: screenplay, art decoration and set decoration

1991: **The Hunt for the Red October**: film editing, sound and sound effects editing (won)

1995: **Clear and Present Danger**: sound and sound effects editing

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