

***The Post*: a Hollywood ode to journalism**

WASHINGTON, USA - At a time when the media is being accused of peddling "fake news," Steven Spielberg, Meryl Streep and Tom Hanks are bringing Hollywood star power to a movie celebrating journalism and the virtues of a free press.



Image credit: [Collider](#).

The Post, which comes out in theatres in the United States on Friday, recounts the nail-biting behind-the-scenes story of the 1971 publication by *The Washington Post* of the Pentagon Papers, which exposed the lies behind US involvement in the Vietnam War.

Directed by Spielberg, whose long list of credits includes *Saving Private Ryan*, *Schindler's List*, *Jaws* and *E.T.*, *The Post* stars Streep as aristocratic Post publisher Katharine Graham and Hanks as the newspaper's scrappy executive editor Ben Bradlee.

The drama at the heart of the film revolves around Graham's decision to go ahead and publish the Pentagon Papers, a move which could have had potentially fatal consequences for the family newspaper she took over eight years earlier upon the suicide of her husband.

Braving legal and financial peril

The Pentagon Papers, leaked by whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg, were a 7,000-page classified report which determined – contrary to the public assertions of US government officials – that the Vietnam conflict was unwinnable.

The New York Times published excerpts until the administration of President Richard Nixon obtained a court injunction barring the newspaper from continuing to do so on national security grounds.

That's where the *Post* stepped in, braving legal and financial peril to take up the torch.

Spielberg, Streep and Hanks attended a screening of *The Post* at the shrine to journalism, the Newseum, in Washington last week, located just a few blocks from the White House on Pennsylvania Avenue.

Not present but looming over the event was President Donald Trump, who has waged a vitriolic campaign against media outlets he believes are unfair to him.

Dishonest, phony and fake news

Trump has been particularly scathing about CNN and *The New York Times* but he has also repeatedly attacked the *Post*, calling it "dishonest," "phony" and – his favourite – "fake news."

He refers to the newspaper in his tweets as the Amazon Washington Post, a reference to Jeff Bezos, the owner of online retail giant Amazon who purchased the *Post* from the Graham family in 2013.

Speaking to reporters on the red carpet at the Newseum screening, Spielberg, Hanks and Streep – once dismissed by Trump as "overrated" – were reluctant to call out the president by name and downplayed suggestions the movie was a shot across the bow of his White House.

"I think it's very, very important that our movie is seen not as a political, partisan play on the part of what they call the liberal media or Hollywood," Spielberg said.

"I see it not as a partisan movie," he said, "but a movie about patriotism and a movie about the courageous media, the Fourth Estate, and what they did to be able to get the Pentagon Papers published, which then led to Watergate."

Fresh threats to press freedom

Watergate, of course, was the subject of a 1976 Hollywood blockbuster in which *The Washington Post* also played a starring role – *All the President's Men* featuring Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman as *Post* reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein.

Despite Spielberg's protestations, reviewers are finding parallels inescapable between *The Post* and its championing of the media and the non-stop vilification of the press by Trump.

"(*The Post*) takes you back to a time when the outcome was precarious, and the freedoms we thought we took for granted hung in the balance," said *Variety*. "Just as they do today."

For *The New Yorker*, *The Post* is "not a period movie."

"Instead, it is squarely addressed to the present day, striving for the urgency of a headline," it said. "The film is here to warn us of fresh threats to press freedom."

Source: *AFP* via I-Net Bridge

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