Steven Spielberg, dir., *The Post,* with Meryl Streep, Tom Hanks and Bob Odenkirk. (New York, NY: DreamWorks Pictures, 20th Century Fox, Amblin Entertainment, Participant Media, Pascal Pictures, Star Thrower Entertainment, 2017), film.

With the relentless attacks on the free press over the last year, there are few films more relevant in our "fake news" world than *The Post.* Legendary director Steven Spielberg brings to the silver screen the harrowing tale of *The Washington Post's* push to publish the Pentagon Papers, a controversial report on U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Set in a beautifully recreated 1971 Washington DC, the film is more than a retelling of the controversy. Screenwriters Liz Hannah and Josh Singer (*Spotlight*) purposefully deemphasize the Pentagon papers themselves in order to hone in on issues such as the limits of a free press, media bias and misogyny within the publishing world.

Katharine Graham, owner and publisher of *The Washington Post* assumes control of the company after her husband Philip's suicide. A woman with power in a predominantly male domain, she is portrayed as unsure of both herself and her managerial skills, musing that she was much happier as a wife and mother. Her all-male board of directors constantly question her decisions, as does her editor-in-chief, Ben Bradlee, who strives to compete with the more prestigious *New York Times*. She soon finds herself at the center of the greatest controversy of the time, when assistant editor Ben Bagdikian presents Bradlee with a chance to publish the Pentagon Papers after a court order blocks the *Times* from doing so. When Bagdikian reveals his source is also the *Times* source, Daniel Ellsberg, things become more complicated. A former State Department military analyst, Ellsberg had been sent to Vietnam in 1966 to document military progress in the conflict for Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, a personal friend of Graham.

If published, both Bradlee and Graham would face contempt of court charges. Moreover, it would jeopardize the initial public offering of the company, potentially bankrupting it. Yet, if successful, the release of the report would heighten the profile of the *Post* dramatically, allowing them to compete with the *Times*. They eventually joined the *Times* as co-defendants against the

government. Unfortunately, the case which allowed the press to release the report is covered in about two minutes. The court ruled that, "the press was to serve the governed, not the governors." Both papers win, but the film fails to discuss how the court reached its verdict which is essential to the press' ability to hold the government accountable. In attempting to reflect today's political landscape, the film diminished the very historical moment it was trying to convey. Some might criticize the portrayal of the IPO, as something designed to enrich the board members, including Graham. Regardless of whether the IPO was motivated by greed or a desire to save the family business, the IPO story does not detract from the film's central story, that of a free press under siege from an increasingly secretive and paranoid White House.

The film is able to highlight more contemporary issues like the integrity of the press, its ability to confront abuses of government, and female agency in predominately male spaces by redirecting emphasis from the Pentagon papers, Daniel Ellsberg and *The New York Times.*

The Post is a riveting film in the vein of *All the President's Men* and *Spotlight*. It is an intriguing story about the first woman to head a major U.S. newspaper and her decision to risk everything and release a very controversial report that could have destroyed her company. As the current administration ramps up its attacks on American institutions, *The Pos*t reminds its audience of the importance of the Fourth Estate to hold government accountable.

Chiqutara Kendall