



FILM: **THE POST**

FDG RATING: 3.6



Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Steven Spielberg: *director*

Meryl Streep: *actress, Katharine Graham*

Tom Hanks: *actor, Ben Bradlee*

DATE: January 21, 2018

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **THE POST**

The Post stars a dynamic acting duo: Meryl Streep as Katharine Graham who inherits the position of publisher at the age of 46 when her husband dies, (her father had given control of the paper to her husband) and Tom Hanks as Ben Bradlee, longtime executive editor. Although, the story takes place during the anxious weeks in 1971 when the Washington Post struggles with the risky decision whether or not to publish portions of the Pentagon Papers, an immense classified report that chronicled America's involvement in Southeast Asia from World War II to 1968, the themes of freedom of the press resonate with today's threats to journalists' rights. Steven Spielberg definitely felt a sense of urgency to "tell this story today;" a story about journalists standing up to an adversarial presidency. He interrupted work on another film to make The Post in a fleeting 9 months.

Historically, Daniel Ellsberg, the Marine turned government researcher turned clandestine peacenik first leaked the Pentagon Papers to The New York Times. The Times began running portions on June 13, 1971. After the attorney general, John Mitchell, accused The Times of violating the Espionage Act, a judge ordered it to stop publishing the papers. At a pivotal time in American history, the government was preventing the press from getting the news out, on the grounds that it would do injury to national security. Shortly thereafter, The Post, which had been publishing rewrites of The Times's articles, began running its own excerpts, becoming part of a Supreme Court showdown over the First Amendment. One film critic explained that "The Pentagon Papers ... is an encyclopedia of outrageous decisions and acts, what Mr. Ellsberg once described as 'evidence of lying, by four presidents and their administrations over twenty-three years, to conceal plans and actions of mass murder.'"

The spotlight of the film is on Katharine Graham and most of us admired Streep's performance. Graham is pressured from all sides, has concerns about betraying her politician friends, is challenged by the lack of respect from the men she works with, and has to make this enormous decision about publishing the leaked documents during the same week that *The Washington Post* is to go public, knowing that the underwriters would probably not support such an act of defiance and she would potentially put the entire company in jeopardy.

It was great to see this perspective of the historical event focusing on the strength and decisiveness of this first female publisher of a major newspaper - to watch her establish and exercise her authority. But a few of us would have preferred a more chameleonesque character actress for the part since Katherine evidently, "oozed much more drama" (according to her biographer). Streep acted as the character rather than transforming into the character "Kay", who had a bawdy sense of humor, was more "ballsy" and less saintly. The same goes for Tom Hanks who of course was excellent in the role of Bradlee, but we never lose sight of Tom Hanks.

One of the most fascinating parts was seeing the dated linotype technology, watching the sheets of newsprint rolling on the huge presses, and witnessing the speed of every tedious step to produce the entire morning edition of the latest news.

Some commented that although interesting and good entertainment, the film would have benefited from adding more complexity. Maybe if Spielberg hadn't rushed the release, "take 1" could have been improved.

The Post rallied a mostly positive rating of 3.6 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best).



See you at the movies!

Adriane Dedic, adedic@pacbell.net

www.filmdiscussiongroup.com