

Spotlight

It's 'Boston Globe' vs. Catholic Church in the best film about reporting since 'All the President's Men'

[Peter Travers](#) November 4, 2015 2:00PM ET

There's no higher compliment to pay this steadily riveting, quietly devastating take on investigative journalism than to say [Spotlight](#) gets it right. So did the Spotlight team on *The Boston Globe* when, in 2002, it published nearly 600 articles on child sex-abuse allegations against Catholic priests and the church cover-ups that followed. The team won a Pulitzer for its scalding exposé. And right now the film is the predictive favorite to win the Best Picture Oscar. But awards are merely icing on a cake whose candles glow in tribute to long-form print journalism, now fading in the digital fog of budget cuts, reduced resources and click-bait news cycles.

Bravo to director Tom McCarthy ([The Station Agent](#), [Win Win](#), [The Visitor](#)), who wrote the richly detailed script with Josh Singer ([The Fifth Estate](#)). There's not an ounce of Hollywood bullshit in it. Our eyes and ears are the Spotlight team, played by exceptional actors who could not be better or more fully committed.

[Michael Keaton](#) is in peak form as Spotlight editor Walter "Robby" Robinson, a stickler who is tough on reporters Michael Rezendes ([Mark Ruffalo](#)) and Sacha Pfeiffer ([Rachel McAdams](#)) and researcher Matt Carroll (Brian d'Arcy James). Robinson is skeptical that his newspaper, whose readers and staffers are largely Irish-Catholic, can tackle the Boston Archdiocese. Caution also guides *Globe* deputy managing editor Ben Bradlee Jr. ([John Slattery](#)), whose father, *Washington Post* editor Ben Bradlee, risked his job on the Watergate coverage.



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The kick in the ass for *Spotlight* comes from an outsider: Marty Baron (a terrific Liev Schreiber), the paper's new top editor, a Floridian and the first Jew to call the shots at the *Globe*. Baron rightfully suspects a conspiracy and turns *Spotlight* loose. McCarthy and camera wizard Masanobu Takayanagi track the grinding work of real reporting. As Carroll, the excellent James digs into sealed records of priests whose crimes are swept aside. Political, social and legal systems are found complicit, including plaintiffs' lawyer Eric MacLeish (Billy Crudup) and Cardinal Bernard Law (Len Cariou). McAdams, sharp and sympathetic, shows us how Pfeiffer draws out details from victims whose childhoods meant sucking the dick of a priest who says he's had a bad day. And Ruffalo is a marvel of purpose as Rezendes hounds

attorney Mitchell Garabedian (Stanley Tucci) for access to survivors of sex abuse.

It's these survivors who give *Spotlight* its beating heart. Roiling emotions are also felt among reporters who desperately want to get the story right and just as desperately want to get it first. That tension makes for an insanely gripping high-wire act and the year's most thrilling detective story. These reporters are jittery obsessives who put their lives on hold for a story they believe in. Do they get off on it? You bet. They're hardcore guardians of an endangered galaxy. And heroes, in my book. At times, it's hard not to choke up, but *Spotlight* refuses to wallow in nostalgia. This landmark film takes a clear-eyed look at the digital future and honors the one constant that journalism needs to stay alive and relevant: a fighting spirit.