

‘Spotlight’ Offers a Relevant First Draft to History

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on November 16, 2015 - 6:57pm

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – “Spotlight” is a movie which aspires to greatness and oftentimes just about gets there. It’s a movie that is thoroughly confident that the process of journalism and a great story provides all the excitement it needs to grab an audience’s attention. And what a great story it is.

“Spotlight” centers on the Boston Globe’s pulitzer prize winning investigation that uncovered the priest abuse sex scandal in the Catholic Church in Boston. It’s populated by a top flight cast led by Michael Keaton, Mark Ruffalo, John Slattery, Rachel McAdams, Stanley Tucci and Liev Schreiber. While Hollywood dramatizations of real events always have a risk of being too pat or patronizing, since the audience presumably already knows the ending, this film digs deep into the seeds of doubt and hand wringing involved in coming to such a conclusion.



Rachel McAdams, Michael Keaton and Mark Ruffalo in ‘Spotlight’

Photo credit: Open Roads Film (II)

The film starts small with a suggestion from an unlikely source, the newly installed editor of the Boston Globe (Liev Schreiber). He's an out of townner who doesn't know Boston from Baltimore, and arrived just off the plane from Florida. On literally his first day on the job, he tells the investigative unit to look into an old case involving an allegedly abusive priest which had been featured by one of the paper's columnists. There are legions of dismissals from the newsroom staff because the lawyer representing the priests victims is a crackpot, and another lawyer is a media hog, and so on and so forth. But they decide to dig in and see what they find.

In this talented cast, Keaton and Ruffalo are the standouts. Keaton portrays the senior editor and leader of the Spotlight team at the Boston Globe – whose ties to the Boston establishment and the church officials are nearly as old as Boston itself. Ruffalo is a lapsed Catholic who is on the outs with his wife and throws himself into his work. He's the persistent attack dog who's not afraid annoy the hell out of someone or look like an asshole to get what he wants. But the key point in his performance is that he keeps his kettle at a simmer, it never blows. While his incredulity grows as he uncovers more and more victims, and information about the scandal, Ruffalo almost never spills over into the kind of actor-y tirade that tends to draw the attention of Awards voters.



The Cast of 'Spotlight'

Photo credit: Open Roads Film (II)

It's a gripping story to watch because the bigger picture is by no means crystal clear from the outset. But it was truly fascinating to watch Keaton and his team put together individual pieces that didn't seem like much on their own, and were often "buried in metro" – meaning the stories were dumped into the local crime blotter and then forgotten. But when they were put together a pattern was revealed that no one saw, because no one was looking for it.

I happen to be a fan of Keaton's previous foray into the newspaper world, the underrated similarly star studded 1990's drama "The Paper." That film was entertaining, but no one would put it up there with "All The President's Men." But with "Spotlight," Michael Keaton leads a film that deserves a place among the best newspaper movies ever made.

"Spotlight" opens in select theaters throughout November of 2015. Check local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Michael Keaton, Mark Ruffalo, Rachel McAdams, Stanley Tucci, Liev Schreiber, John Slattery and Stanley Tucci. Screenplay by Tom McCarthy and Josh Singer. Directed by Tom McCartney. Rated "R"



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