Film: Literature and Law

FM 241.01/EN244.01

John J. Michalczyk
Tuesdays, 6:30-9:00 PM

Interest in the rapport between film and literature as it relates to the law intrigues us as much today as ever. Literature can vividly capture the drama of a legal trial or an investigation into a brutal, racial murder. Film then takes this rich material and shapes it into a compelling form with dynamic visuals and other narrative techniques. This course explores the power of story-telling and the impact of film to portray the inner workings of law and its relationship to ideas about inferiority, liberty, citizenry, race, justice, crime, punishment, and social order. Short stories, plays, and novellas with their accompanying film adaptations will comprise the body of the curriculum.

All texts are required and will be available at the Bookstore or can be purchased through Amazon.com. Check online for free texts. Reflection questions based on the readings and film screenings will be emailed prior to each class.

Class: Date/Texts/Films

1. Jan. 17
   Introduction and methodology utilized in the course
   Literary excerpts with analysis of form and content
   Arthur Miller: *The Crucible*
   Film: Nicholas Hytner’s *The Crucible*
   The Salem witch trials and the sensitive conscience of John Proctor, an allegory of the McCarthy era.

2. Jan. 24
   Arthur Miller: *The Crucible* (discussion)
   Film: David Helpem’s *Hollywood on Trial* documenting the 1948 trial of Hollywood 10.
   Film: *High Noon*, a Western allegory about standing up against oppression during the McCarthy era.

3. Jan. 31
   Robert Bolt: *Man for All Seasons*
   Film: Zinnemane’s *Man for All Seasons*
   Thomas More, a man of conscience, stands up against Henry VIII.

4. Feb. 7
   Robert Traever (John Voelker): *Anatomy of a Murder*
   Film: Otto Preminger’s *Anatomy of a Murder*
   A “perfect” legal drama of a veteran who is on trial for murder.
5. Feb. 21
Lawrence and Lee: *Inherit the Wind*
Film: Stanley Kramer’s *Inherit the Wind*
The 1925 Scopes (or “Monkey”) Trial: Evolution vs. Creationism.

6. Feb. 28 [FIRST PAPER DUE]
Harper Lee: *To Kill a Mockingbird*
Film: Robert Mulligan’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*
Racial prejudice tears apart an Alabama town over rape charges of a Black man.

7. March 13
Reginald Rose: *Twelve Angry Men*
Film: Sidney Lumet’s *Twelve Angry Men*
The power of an individual conscience in a jury trial.

8. March 13
Donn Pierce: *Cool Hand Luke*
Film: Stuart Rosenberg’s *Cool Hand Luke*
Injustices in the chain gang raise Luke to an icon of rebellion.

9. March 20
Piehler and Evans play: *The Triangle Fire* (Guest: Carl Proper)
Documentary Film: *The Triangle Fire*
A deadly NY fire in a garment factory and ensuing law case 100 years ago.

8. March 27 [SECOND PAPER DUE]
Ray Bradbury: *Fahrenheit 451*
Film: Francois Tuffaut’s *Fahrenheit 451*
A futuristic world where books are not read but burned by firefighters.

9. April 3
George Orwell’s *1984*
Film: Michael Radford’s *1984*
A view of a totalitarian force that controls speech, politics, sex, and work through propaganda.

10. April 10
Jonathan Harr: *A Civil Action*
Film: Steven Zaillian
The families of children from Woburn, Mass. who died from toxic wastes sue two companies.

11. April 24
Barry Reed: *The Verdict*
Film: Sidney Lumet’s *The Verdict*
An alcoholic lawyer, Frank Galvin, pursues a medical malpractice case, against all odds.

12. May 1
Analysis of short clips and review

13. May 8: Final Exam
Requirements:
2 papers (4-5 pages each)  Prof. John J. Michalczyk
Class attendance  Fine Arts Department
Participation in class discussions  Devlin Hall 420
Readings of required books  Phone: (617) 552-3895
Final exam (May 8)  Dept. (617) 552-4295
Email: michalcj@bc.edu (best contact)

Office Hours:
During the semester while I am on sabbatical, I will be on campus on occasion during the day, and may be available by arrangement. I will also be available prior to and following class. I can be reached by email to make an appointment.

Please abide by common etiquette (arriving on time, remaining for an entire class, refraining from eating during class, and using computers only for note-taking).

Kindly review the university’s guidelines for academic integrity which obliges us all to document our sources in our personal research.

Books about Law and Film: Possible paper topics could emerge from Kauffmans’s film list here in *The Movie Guide for Legal Studies.*

A guide to movies organized by these topics: courtroom heroes, injustice, experts and frauds, comedies, corruption of justice, circumstantial evidence, civil actions, contempt of court, prejudice, the death penalty, military justice, and family law. The authors summarize plots, address accuracy, and answer questions about legal issues and jargon used in the films. This edition contains ratings and about 150 brief film reviews in a category called "short subjects." Indexes are by topic, rating, and movie title.

Through its exploration of the "legal" film genre, Movies on Trial is an illuminating and entertaining examination of the interrelationship between law and film. While the dramatic possibilities of the courtroom scene have long been familiar to moviegoers, beyond that trope our culture relies upon a concept of the law drawn from images presented on the silver screen. Law professor and movie aficionado Anthony Chase focuses on how movies fit into our history, our politics and, particularly, our legal values and assumptions.

Film and the Law is concerned with the phenomena of films about law, lawyers and justice. These have a long and distinguished history ranging from the classic *Young Mr Lincoln* in 1939 to the contemporary *Erin Brockovich*. The book examines the major theoretical perspectives within which 20th century work on law and film has appeared and analyses the problem of how law films can be classified. It provides a critical review of the work produced to date before proceeding to analyse the general features and ideology of law films. Apart from reviewing the way law and lawyers are portrayed in film generally, the book covers areas such as the use of true stories as the basis for film, the limited portrayals of judges and juries and the role of what we have termed invisible lawyers. In addition, the influence of film noir and particularly private eyes is examined along with an analysis of the Film and the Law concludes by examining future developments for
film and the law and how its future terrain might be mapped.


*The Legal Movie Guide* provides an easy way for professors to incorporate key scenes and films of a legal, judicial, or public policy nature into their course. Briefing 40 legal movies, entries include a synopsis of each film, its key facts, actors, length and overall rating. Going beyond just descriptions, it identifies key legal themes within each movie and correlates films to specific legal courses. Scenes are broken down into five to fifteen minute pieces and discussion suggestions provide tangible assignments students can complete after viewing each scene from the following films: *12 angry men*, *The accused*, *Anatomy of a murder*, *And justice for all*, *Animal farm*, *Body heat*, *Changing lanes*, *A civil action*, *Class action*, *The Client*, *Criminal law*, *Disclosure*, *Erin Brockovich*, *A Few good men*, *The Firm*, *Fracture*, *Intolerable cruelty*, *Jagged edge*, *Legal eagles*, *Liar liar*, *The Life of David Gale*, *Michael Clayton*, *Minority report*, *My cousin Vinny*, *Nuts*, *The Paper chase*, *Philadelphia*, *Presumed innocent*, *Primal fear*, *The Rainmaker*, *Runaway jury*, *The Star chamber*, *Suspect*, *A Time to kill*, *Thank you for smoking*, *To kill a mockingbird*, *The Verdict*, *Wall street*, *The War of the roses*, *The Winslow boy*, *Young Mr. Lincoln*.


This innovative teaching resource lists films with significant courtroom scenes, illustrating the dramatic and tactical aspects of adversarial practice, including the demonstration of evidentiary rules in practice. The structure of the filmography is divided into two parts: the subject index followed by the synopses of films (see samples below) and subdivided by jurisdiction. The book encourages debate and discussion about the uses and role of law and its assumptions, its techniques of fact-finding and mechanisms for establishing truth. Covers civil and criminal law with a range of cases, from AIDS (*Philadelphia*) to war (*Judgement at Nuremberg*, *QB VII*), using films from the US, Great Britain, Australia and other countries.


One of the most important legal developments in the last half of the twentieth century was the change from criminal justice policies shaped primarily by liberal ideas to those shaped primarily by conservative ideas. This book examines images of law in Hollywood films and television crime dramas to better understand this conservative revolution in thinking about crime. The crime stories depicted in popular legal fiction provide interesting as well as insightful perspectives on law in American society, particularly changing images of justice and its administration as well as individual rights.


American legal film is a fertile genre, and well liked once people are reminded of examples, says Levi, but is not generally recognized or studied. A film is in the genre, he says, if it has something to say about the way Americans view their legal system and the players within it. He looks in turn at the major players in such films--the client, judge, jury, and lawyer--and examines how their portrayals have changed over the course of cinematic history.
