Film: Literature and Law

FM 241.01

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

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Office Hours:  Monday 11 am to noon and Wednesday 11 am to noon, as well as prior to and following class.
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Schedule: Tuesday, 6:30 to 9 PM.     Room: Devlin 010

Boston College Mission Statement
Strengthened by more than a century and a half of dedication to academic excellence, Boston College commits itself to the highest standards of teaching and research in undergraduate, graduate and professional programs and to the pursuit of a just society through its own accomplishments, the work of its faculty and staff, and the achievements of its graduates. It seeks both to advance its place among the nation's finest universities and to bring to the company of its distinguished peers and to contemporary society the richness of the Catholic intellectual ideal of a mutually illuminating relationship between religious faith and free intellectual inquiry.

Boston College draws inspiration for its academic societal mission from its distinctive religious tradition. As a Catholic and Jesuit university, it is rooted in a world view that encounters God in all creation and through all human activity, especially in the search for truth in every discipline, in the desire to learn, and in the call to live justly together. In this spirit, the University regards the contribution of different religious traditions and value systems as essential to the fullness of its intellectual life and to the continuous development of its distinctive intellectual heritage.

Course Description

FM 24101 Film: Literature and Law
Interest in the rapport between film and literature as it relates to the law intrigues us as much today as ever. Literature captures 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. The course explores the power of story-telling and the impact of film to embody and inhabit law and its relationship to ideas about inferiority, liberty, citizenry, race, justice, crime, punishment, and social order. Film adaptations from short stories, plays, and novellas will comprise the body of the curriculum.
January 14 to May 6, 3 credits
Course Objectives

1. The student will learn how an actual incident or event evolves to an aesthetic expression in a written work, be it a play or novel, and then emerges as a feature film.
2. The student will learn the art of adaptation from text to screen.
3. The student will also become proficient in film analysis, studying elements of plot, characterization and cinematography.

Further Objectives

1. The student will also demonstrate knowledge across cultural settings and will learn the impact of culture, gender, race, and age as demonstrated in various film adaptations such as *Inherit the Wind* and *1984*.
2. The student will demonstrate ethical knowledge as it pertains to legal issues viewed in the film adaptations.

Grading

Students will be graded on both CONTENT and STYLE for the two required essays based on film viewings outside of class. A final exam will conclude the course. In addition a STUDENT INPUT FORM will be filled out to indicate what additional work the student has completed outside class for the course.

WCAS Grading System

The undergraduate grading system consists of twelve categories: A (4.00), A- (3.67), excellent; B+ (3.33), B (3.00), B- (2.67), good; C+ (2.33), C (2.00), C- (1.67), satisfactory; D+ (1.33), D (1.00), D- (0.67), passing but unsatisfactory; F (0.00), failure; I (0.00), incomplete; F (0.00), course dropped without notifying office; W (0.00), official withdrawal from course. The graduate grading system is A (4.00), A- (3.67), Excellent; B+ (3.33), B (3.00), good; B- (2.67), C (2.00), passing but not for degree credit; F (0.00), failure.

Grade Reports. All students are required to log into the web through Agora to access their semester grades. Students must utilize their BC username and password to log on. If your username or password is not known the HELP Desk located in the Campus Technology Resource Center (CTRC) in O’Neill Library will issue a new one. The CTRC requires a valid picture ID (a BC ID, driver’s license or passport) to obtain your password.

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.

Text(s)/Readings (Required)

BRADBURY: *FAHRENHEIT 451*

LAWRENCE: *INHERIT THE WIND*

MILLER, *THE CRUCIBLE*

LEE: *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*

ORWELL: *1984*

PEARCE: *COOL HAND LUKE*
PIEHLER: TRIANGLE FACTORY FIRE PROJECT

ROSE: TWELVE ANGRY MEN

BOLT: A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

HARR: A CIVIL ACTION

Class: Date/Texts/Films

1. Jan.14
   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. 21
   Arthur Miller: The Crucible (discussion)
   Film: David Helpern’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. (Rio Bravo is an attempt to challenge High Noon’s thesis)
   Media Center: See High Noon on reserve

3. Jan. 28
   Robert Bolt: Man for All Seasons
   Film: Zinneman’s Man for All Seasons
   Thomas More, a man of conscience, stands up against Henry VIII.

4. Feb. 4
   Robert Traever (John Voelker): Anatomy of a Murder (recommended reading)
   Film: Otto Preminger’s Anatomy of a Murder
   A “perfect” legal drama of a veteran who is on trial for murder.

NO CLASS ON FEB. 11 (WOODS COLLEGE)

5. Feb. 18
   Lawrence and Lee: Inherit the Wind
   Film: Stanley Kramer’s Inherit the Wind
   The 1925 Scopes (or “Monkey”) Trial: Evolution vs. Creationism.

6. Feb. 25 [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.
   Media Center: See A Time to Kill
7. March 11
   Reginald Rose: *Twelve Angry Men*
   Film: Sidney Lumet’s *Twelve Angry Men*
   The power of an individual conscience in a jury trial.

8. March 18
   Piehler and Evans play: *The Triangle Fire*
   Documentary Film: *The Triangle Fire*
   A deadly NY fire in a garment factory and ensuing law case 100 years ago.

9. March 25 [SECOND PAPER DUE]
   Ray Bradbury: *Fahrenheit 451*
   Film: Francois Turffaut’s *Fahrenheit 451*
   A futuristic world where books are not read but burned by firefighters.

10. April 1
    George Orwell: *1984*
    Film: Michael Radford’s *1984*
    A view of a totalitarian force that controls speech, politics, sex, and work through propaganda.
    Media Center: See *Judgement at Nuremberg*

11. April 8
    Jonathan Harr: *A Civil Action*
    Film: *A Civil Action*
    The families of children from Woburn, Mass. who died from toxic wastes sue two companies.

12. April 15
    Barry Reed: *The Verdict* (recommended reading)
    Film: Sidney Lumet’s *The Verdict*
    An alcoholic lawyer, Frank Galvin, pursues a medical malpractice case, against all odds.
    Media Center: See *Philadelphia*

NO CLASS ON APRIL 22 (WOODS COLLEGE)

13. April 29
    Donn Pierce: *Cool Hand Luke*
    Film: Stuart Rosenberg’s *Cool Hand Luke*
    Injustices in the chain gang raise Luke to an icon of rebellion.

14. May 6: 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
Viewing of films at Media Center                      Dept.  (617) 552-4295
Final exam (May 6)                                    Email: michalcj@bc.edu
                                                   (best contact)
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.

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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.