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U N F O R T U N A T E L Y B Y A D A M R U S S O

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Any law student who's taken an ethics course has probably become acquainted with the notion that the general public considers lawyers as sleazy sycophants who hide their own economic interests behind a cloak of legalese. Even if you haven't taken an ethics course recently, you don't need to look very far to see the dismal view laypeople have of lawyers. For instance, movies and other media now have a long tradition of depicting lawyers as cunning, cruel, and horribly greedy. Classic examples of this archetype include Martin Vail, (Richard Gere) who is arrogant and crass towards his friends and clients in Primal Fear (1996); Kathleen Riley, (Cher) who suffers horrendous burn out while working for a public defender in Suspect (1987); Dave Kleinfeld, (Sean Penn) who is a heavy-duty cocaine addict in Carlito's Way (1993); Ned Racine (William Hurt) who is a money-grubbing and slothful attorney in Body Heat (1981); Miles Massey (George Clooney) who is a successful divorce attorney oozing sleaze, weakness, and arrogance in Intolerable Cruelty (2003); and to top it off, John Milton (Al Pacino) who is literally Satan himself in the aptly titled Devil's Advocate (1997). Movies are not alone in their depiction of lawyers as deplorable. Startlingly, user-generated content on Youtube also features many videos of both law students and lawyers acting foolishly and unethically.

As odd as it may seem to the current moviegoer, lawyers were not always depicted as crooks and head cases. Depression-era films displayed lawyers in a positive light over half the time. Movies such as Adam's Rib (1949) and To Kill a Mockingbird (1962) depicted lawyers as

friendly, loyal, extremely ethical, and dedicated to removing societal ills via the law. Perhaps more telling than comparing recent movies to their older counterparts are the contrasts between the original Cape Fear and its remake. In the original, Sam Bowden (Gregory Peck) is a family man and is unjustly persecuted by an individual whom he had testified against. In the remake however, Bowden (Nick Nolte) is a philandering jerk who is tormented by an ex-client (Robert DeNiro) whose case he had intentionally and unethically mishandled. So, why the sudden change in the depiction of lawyers? And more importantly: are these depictions warranted?

Sadly, it appears that they are. Polls on CNN.com reveal that "Americans think lawyers are dishonest and overpaid." Other news outlets consistently report of lawyers and judges sleeping with clients, breaching client trust and absconding with funds, and generally taking advantage of their knowledge of the law to act as though they are above it. Worse still, nearly one-third of lawyers publicly state that they are dissatisfied with the legal profession and would change jobs if they could. Faced with such overwhelming data, it's hard to not be discouraged about the future of lawyers in America.

Luckily, the past does not need to dictate the future. As young lawyers enter the workforce today, they are no longer sheltered by the idea that they are respectable simply because they can attach Esq. to the end of their names. Instead, young lawyers today seem to understand that they must work towards earning and keeping the pub-

PERCEPTION (CONT.)

ethical behavior in dealing with clients, other lawyers, and tribunals. Hopefully these young professionals can respond to the public's deep-seated disappointment with the current behavior they see being committed by legal professionals. If they can succeed in doing so, perhaps one day the general public will be able to point to the silver screen with appreciation and say, "I know a lawyer just like that."

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LAWYERS ON THE SCREEN A SELECTED
FILMOGRAPHY BY JEANNE BENNETT

Absence of Malice (1981) – Newspaper drama where a novice reporter at a Miami daily paper is duped by a scheming organized crime strike force attorney investigating a liquor distributor suspected of being involved in a mob murder. Three Oscar nominations.

The Accused (1988) – A woman is gang-raped in a local bar and, when the attackers go free, she persuades a reluctant prosecutor to press charges against the men who cheered on the attack. Jodie Foster won an Oscar.

Adam's Rib (1949) – Husband and wife are opposing attorneys in a sensational murder trial in this comedy directed by George Cukor.

Amistad (1997) - Steven Spielberg directed this historic drama of the famous 1839 slave ship uprising which occurred in U.S. waters and where the slave's fate must ultimately be decided by the U.S. Supreme Court. Features an all-star cast.

Anatomy of a Murder (1959) – Legal thriller profiling the attempts of a country lawyer to exonerate an Army lieutenant accused of murdering a local bartender who allegedly raped his wife. Nominated for seven Oscars.

Billy Budd (1962) – Adaptation of Herman Melville's classic seafaring story about the personal and physical struggle between Billy Budd, a young, innocent sailor on a British wartime ship and his cold, cruel and often vicious superior.

Beyond a Reasonable Doubt (1956) – Classic film noir thriller where a writer sets himself up as a prime suspect in a murder he did not commit to expose the shortcomings of circumstantial evidence.

Body Heat (1981) - A steamy mystery about a femme fatale who manipulates a naïve Florida attorney to murder her wealthy older husband.

Breaker Morant (1980) - Three Australian soldiers are court-martialed for murder in 1901, at the end of South Africa's bloody Boer War and their attorney has just one day to prepare a defense and prove they acted under orders. The film won 10 Australian Academy Awards, including Best Picture and Best Director.

The Caine Mutiny (1954) – In this part adventure and part courtroom drama, the stern Captain Queeg drives his crew to the brink of mutiny.

The Chamber (1996) – In this screen adaptation of the John Grisham novel, a Mississippi Klansman is only a month away from execution for the murder of the two young sons of a Jewish civil rights attorney when his estranged grandson takes on his appeal.

Chicago (2002) – Screen adaption of the famed Broadway musical by Bob Fosse, where sleazeball defense attorney Billy Flynn turns a murderess into a tabloid sensation singing and tap dancing abound. Best Picture winner.

Citizen Cohn (1992) – A once brilliant and brutal attorney now dying of AIDS hallucinates his past, including his famed involvement in the Rosenberg trial, in the McCarthy period of the 1950s, and his attempts with J. Edgar Hoover to undermine the civil rights movement. This made-for-cable movie earned Emmy and Golden Globe nominations for James Woods.

Civil Action (1998) – Massachusetts townfolk represented by small-firm Boston plaintiff's lawyers sue corporate polluter they believe is responsible for the leukemia-related deaths among the town's children.

Class Action (1991) - Father and daughter attorneys clash in and outside the courtroom as they square off in a heated product liability case.

The Client (1994) – Screen adaptation of John Grisham novel where an underwhelming lawyer finds herself representing a young boy who has overheard a mobsters conversation discussing the where the body of a missing Louisiana senator is buried.

Compulsion (1959) – Based on the famed 1924 Leopold-Loeb murder trial, two brilliant teenagers from wealthy families have sought to plot and execute the perfect murder. Cannes film award winners for individual performances.

Conspiracy: The Trial of the Chicago 8 (1987) – Movie about the Chicago Eight (Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, et al.) who are brought to trial for conspiracy and intent to riot for their participation in political protests that led to violent confrontations with Chicago police during the 1968 Democratic National Convention.

Counsellor at Law (1933) – Workaholic, Robin-Hood-like lawyer who bilks his rich clients to help the poor is found out and must repair his damaged reputation and defend his altruism to avoid being disbarred.

The Court Martial of Billy Mitchell (1955) – Courtroom drama based on real life events, a maverick general who thinks an airplane can sink a ship is court-martialed for proving it. Elizabeth Montgomery in her film debut.

A Cry in the Dark (1988) - An Australian mother who sees her infant daughter carried off by a wild dog while on a family camping trip is herself accused of murdering her own child and then must endure the travesty of trial both in the courts and the media.

The Devil's Advocate (1997) – Creepy thriller about a new attorney introduced into the world's most powerful law firm discovers that its managing partner is morally challenged.

Erin Brockovich (2000) – True story of paralegal/sassy single mom whose relentless investigation into a suspicious real estate case exposes a cover up of illegal dumping of highly toxic hexa-valent chromium and leads to one of the heftiest class action suits in U.S. history. Julia Roberts won an Academy Award for her role.

LAWYERS ON THE SCREEN (CONT.)

A Few Good Men (1992) - Re-luctant, cocky, navy JAG litigator and his co-counsel are assigned to a murder case and uncover a hazing ritual that could implicate high-ranking officials in this military courtroom drama. Oscar nominations.

Find Me Guilty (2006) - Based on the true story of Jack DiNorscio, an infamous mobster who defended himself in court rather than rat out his cohorts in what would be the longest mafia trial in U.S. history.

The Firm (1993) - After graduating from Harvard Law School, a young lawyer is recruited by a prestigious Memphis law firm and he gradually learns the firm has a very sinister background.

The Fortune Cookie (1966) - Comedy about a sleazy lawyer who talks a relative into feigning injury for the sake of a lawsuit.

Ghosts of Mississippi (1996) - The true story of a widow's efforts to bring to justice Byron De La Beckwith for the 30-year-old murder of her husband, civil rights activist Medgar Evers.

High Crimes (2002) - Smart criminal defense attorney teams up with a former military attorney to defend her military husband who was charged with the murder of civilians during a covert Army operation in El Salvador 15 years earlier.

Inherit the Wind (1960) - Story of opposing attorneys in this blistering courtroom drama about the famed 1930s "Scopes Monkey Trial," where a Tennessee teacher was taken to task for teaching Darwinism in the schoolroom.

Intolerable Cruelty (2003) - The Coen Bros. battle-of-the-sexes comedy centered on a respected attorney going toe-to-toe with his wealthy client's ex-wife who is a skilled gold-digger.

Jagged Edge (1985) - Courtroom mystery where defense attorney who hasn't handled a criminal case in many years defends, and falls for, newspaper publisher who is on trial for the murder of his heiress wife.

JFK (1991) - Oliver Stone's take on New Orleans District Attorney's efforts to solve the Kennedy assassination.

Judgment at Nuremberg (1961) - American judge is chosen to guide a 1948 tribunal trying German's suspected of war crimes during World War II. Academy Award winning film.

Juror (1996) - In an anti-Mafia trial, a juror is pressured to convince her fellow jurors to return a "not guilty" verdict for a mobster on trial for murder.

And Justice for All (1979) - Upstanding angry lawyer faces ethical and legal quandary when he represents a hard-line yet tainted judge accused of rape.

To Kill a Mockingbird (1962) - Based on Harper Lee's Pulitzer Prize winning novel, iconic small-town attorney Atticus Finch defends an innocent black man while his children learn life lessons about race, class and justice.

Kramer vs. Kramer (1979) - An estranged couple fights over custody of their son. This movie swept the Oscars: best actor, best actress, best picture, best director and best screenplay.

Legal Eagles (1986) - A mysterious romantic comedy about art frauder.

Legally Blonde (2001) - Comedy in which a Valley Girl overachiever, jilted by her Harvard-Law-bound boyfriend, enrolls at the same school and must deal with the East Coast elites.

Liar, Liar (1997) - Five-year-old boy's birthday wish that his father stop fibbing comes true and his lawyer/father finds he is incapable of lying. Golden Globe nominated comedy.

The Laramie Project (2002) - Based on the true story about Matthew Shepard of Laramie, Wyo., this film exposes the horrors of homophobia and hate crimes.

A Man for All Seasons (1966) - Period piece where Sir Thomas More, the Tudor-era judge made Chancellor of England, finds himself caught between the murderous King Henry VIII and the powerful Roman Catholic Church.

Michael Clayton (2007) - Dramatic thriller about burned-out corporate lawyer in this look at the dark underbelly of big-firm law.

Miracle on 34th Street (1947) - Holiday classic where improbable courtroom scenes take on whether the defendant is indeed the real Santa Claus.

Music Box (1989) - Hungarian immigrant Mike Laszlo, accused of being a war criminal, is defended in court by his lawyer daughter and she learns more about him than she wants to know.

My Cousin Vinny (1992) - Brash Brooklyn lawyer and his leather-clad brassy girlfriend travel to small-town Alabama to defend his cousin and pal after they were falsely accused of "bumping off" a convenience store clerk.

In the Name of the Father (1993) - Story of real-life father and son, Irishmen falsely accused of murder, in which a hard-nosed district attorney and an imaginative defense attorney combine their talents to defend a kooky "performance artist" who is accused of theft and murder by participating in two separate IRA bombing sprees outside London. Chronicles their struggle to convince British courts of their innocence. Nominated for seven Oscars.

North Country (2005) - Based on an inspiring real-life event that took place in the 1970s, a woman enduring unrelenting abuse by her male counterparts sues Minnesota iron mine for sexual harassment.

The Paper Chase (1973) - A first-year law student desperately seeks the approval of Harvard's sternest professor while struggling with the high pressure and brutal competition of an Ivy League school.

The Pelican Brief (1993) - A Tulane law student unwittingly discovers possible links and reasons for the murder of two Supreme Court Justices in this John Grisham adaptation.

The People vs. Larry Flynt (1996) - Portrayal of renowned porn publisher Larry Flynt's first amendment case that eventually defined the standard for libel by parody.

Philadelphia (1993) - Ivy League educated gay attorney seeks to sue for wrongful termination after he is fired from his big-time law firm after discovering he contracted AIDS. Tom Hanks won the Oscar.

Presumed Innocent (1990) - Based on Scott Turow's best-seller, a top-notch prosecutor finds himself accused of murdering a colleague with whom he's had an affair.

Primal Fear (1996) - Twisty thriller involving a young altar boy accused of killing a priest and his attorney.

The Rainmaker (1997) - Another John Grisham lawyer fights the system, this time a young lawyer wants to help the parents of a terminally ill boy in their suit against an insurance company.

Reversal of Fortune (1990) - Based on the real-life drama, Claus von Bulow hires hard-charging attorney Alan Dershowitz to defend him against charges he put his wife Sunny into a perpetual coma with an insulin overdose.

Suspect (1987) - After a Supreme Court Justice takes his own life and his secretary is found murdered, a homeless, mute Vietnam veteran stands accused, but an over-worked public defender believes he is innocent.

A Time to Kill (1996) - Based on the Grisham novel about a racially charged killing in the Deep South, a vengeful father takes the law into his own hands after his daughter is brutally raped by two white men.

12 Angry Men (1957) - Adaptation of the critically acclaimed stage play chronicling the hostile deliberations of a jury deciding the fate of a teenager accused of fatally stabbing his father in a death penalty case.

The Verdict (1982) - Washed-up, alcoholic lawyer is handed a medical-malpractice case and sees it as one last chance to get his career right.

Witness for the Prosecution (1957) - Based on the Agatha Christie play, esteemed and aging lawyer takes on the defense of an alleged murderer accused of killing a wealthy widow and the accused's only alibi is his wife who decides to testify for the prosecution.

Young Mr. Lincoln (1939) - Fictionalized account of President Lincoln's early adult years with the drama focusing on this defense of two brothers unjustly accused of murder.

For additional listings of lawyers being portrayed on the screen see:

Lawyers and the Law: A Filmography, Legal Reference Services Quarterly, Winter 1983 (v. 3 no.4), at 31-72.

Lawyers and the Law: A Filmography II, Legal Reference Services Quarterly, Winter 1985/86 (v.5 no.4), at 5-42.

Lawyers and the Law: A Television Filmography, Legal Reference Services Quarterly, v. 8, nos. 3/4 1988, at 135-78.

University of Texas Tarlton Law Library, Law in Popular Culture Collection
<http://tarlton.law.utexas.edu/lpop/film.html>



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Law Library Mission Statement

To provide access to the legal information necessary to support the mission of St. Thomas University School of Law by acquiring assets providing comprehensive citation retrieval and the ability to deliver the full text of the documents cited; to support the teaching and research programs of the school of law through direct, continuing and informed relationships with faculty and through programs that educate students about the use and cost of all formats of legal information; to provide access to legal information and publications for St. Thomas University, as a whole.

**LAW LIBRARY SPOTLIGHT
ALEX HANNA LAW LIBRARY**

This Year the St. Thomas Law School Library underwent a minor alteration. Once known only as the STU Law Library this year the library building acquired a new name. During a funding drive that took place in the 2008/2009 year the law school community was thrilled to learn that a significant donation was provided to the law school for naming rights to the STU library.

On April 17th, a dedication of the Ale Hanna Library will take place on campus. The law library staff and administration hope to see you at the Alex Hanna Law Library Dedication .

