



# The Celluloid Courtroom: A History of Legal Cinema

*Ross D. Levi*

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The genre of legal cinema is an extensive and revealing one: it is a body of films that depicts lawyers, clients, criminals, judges, and juries, often not as they actually are, but as we would like them to be. The idealized courtroom of many legal movies tells us a great deal about what we think of our justice system and what we want it to reflect about America, but the films in the genre vary widely in how they do this. From *To Kill a Mockingbird* to *Liar, Liar*, from *A Time to Kill* to *Twelve Angry Men*, we see certain stereotypes repeating themselves again and again: the judge as stern referee, the jury as an ultimately fair body of decisionmakers, the lawyer as hardworking and passionate fighter for the underdog. In this new and comprehensive study of this understudied category of film, author Ross D. Levi argues that, contrary to popular belief, legal movies show us a system that is far more fair than our actual one, with corruption downplayed and greed made subordinate to compassion and compromise. With a comprehensive filmography, penetrating analysis—both cinematic and legal—and engaging discussion of a wide array of movies, *The Celluloid Courtroom* is an indispensable guide to a key aspect of American movies and American justice.

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These are films that have affected as much as reflected the American justice system, as we enter the courts hoping, often against hope, that they will be something like what we've seen in the movies. With a comprehensive filmography, penetrating analysis—both legal and cinematic—and engaging and enlightening discussion, *The Celluloid Courtroom* is an indispensable guide to a key aspect of American movies and American justice.

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