

LAW IN FILM/FILM IN LAW

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This symposium began as a panel of presentations delivered under the auspices of the Association of American Law Schools' (AALS) Section on Law and the Humanities at the AALS Annual Meeting in Atlanta, Georgia, in January 2004. Arranged and organized by Professor Philip N. Meyer of Vermont Law School, the symposium is the latest effort in an annual series from this Section that, over the last four years, has sought to present a spectrum of interdisciplinary scholarship engaging popular representations of law and lawyers as art, instruments of socio-economic hegemony, and signifiers of cultural power. Since 2000, the Section on Law and the Humanities has benefited greatly from a steady increase in active members. This increase was evident at the Atlanta program, which drew nearly 100 participants and culminated in a lively and thoughtful full-room debate that underscored the inclusion and diversity that the Section seeks to foster. This year, the Law and Humanities symposium is publishing six articles, all of which undertake to engage critically the image of the lawyer in film.

In an article entitled "The Slotting Function: How Movies Influence Political Decisions," John Denvir examines representations of law and lawlessness in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, *The Godfather*, *The Godfather II*, and *Dirty Harry*. Using a form of analysis that mixes film criticism with an effects hypothesis akin to George Gerbner's cultivation theory, Denvir places his film study in dialogue with President George W. Bush's violent response to the attacks of September 11, 2001.

James Elkins, in "Reading/Teaching Lawyer Films," chronicles how he uses film as a tool to help his law students develop a set of skills and sensibilities that will enrich them as lawyers and as people. In describing this process of "professional socialization," Elkins provides readers with an endorsement of the educational effectiveness of a number of lawyer films, though he expresses concern that some films may lose their educational value because students find them too entertaining.

In "Using Non-Fiction Films as Visual Texts in the First-Year Criminal Law Course," Philip Meyer sets out to do precisely what the article's title suggests. Meyer offers an empirical analysis of how visual texts can be used effectively in the law classroom, with special emphasis on television programs such as *Frontline* and *The Sopranos*. Meyer presents his view that these texts can enhance law school pedagogy since students learn differently when they engage the law visually and in the context of storytelling.

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Francis M. Nevins, in "Reconnoitering Juriscinema's First Golden Age: Law and Lawyers in Film, 1928-34," reviews films that used lawyers, law and the concept of justice as themes during the era when "talkie" films were emerging in America. In analyzing films from this period, Nevins has coined the neologism "juriscinema" to identify narrative formulas relating to the lawyer character and use of the courtroom that are evident across genre during the early thirties.

For David R. Papke, the focus is on cinematic representations of law professors and whether these representations reflect the reality of law teaching. In "Crusading Hero, Devoted Teacher, and Sympathetic Failure: The Self-Image of the Law Professor in Hollywood Cinema and in Real Life, Too", Papke critically examines representations of legal academicians such as Edward G. Robinson's zealous, self-righteous Lindsay in *I Am the Law*, devoted curmudgeons like Kingsfield in *The Paper Chase* and Stromwell in *Legally Blonde*, and morally flawed, pathetic has-beens typified by Sam Shepard's Callahan, linked romantically to Julia Roberts' character in *The Pelican Brief*. He assesses the impact of these representations on the identities that real law teachers construct for themselves.

Finally, Papke's analysis complements this author's contribution to the symposium, "Law and the Supernatural: How One Film's Truth Compulsion Conceit Critiques and Redeems the Post-O.J. Lawyer," which sets out to assess the cultural power of the magically transfixed trial lawyer in the film *Liar, Liar*.

The AALS Section on Law and the Humanities, in conjunction with the *Vermont Law Review*, is pleased to present to the reader this year's symposium issue, *Law in Film/Film in Law*.