



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

12 Angry Men

12 Angry Men

Directed by: Sidney Lumet

©: Orion, Nova, Twelve Angry Men

Produced by: Henry Fonda, Reginald Rose

Associate Producer: George Justin

Assistant Director: Donald Kranze

Script Supervisor: Faith Elliott

Story and Screenplay by: Reginald Rose

Director of Photography: Boris Kaufman

Operative Cameraman: Saul Midwall

Film Editor: Carl Lerner

Art Director: Robert Markel

Make-up: Herman Buchman

Music Composed and Conducted by:

Kenyon Hopkins

Sound: James A. Gleason

Cast:

Henry Fonda (*Davis, eighth juror*)

Lee J. Cobb (*third juror*)

Ed Begley (*tenth juror*)

E.G. Marshall (*fourth juror*)

Jack Warden (*seventh juror*)

Martin Balsam (*first juror*)

John Fiedler (*second juror*)

Jack Klugman (*fifth juror*)

Edward Binns (*sixth juror*)

Joseph Sweeney (*ninth juror*)

George Voskovec (*eleventh juror*)

Robert Webber (*twelfth juror*)

Rudy Bond (*judge*) *

James A. Kelly (*guard*) *

Billy Nelson (*court clerk*) *

John Savoca (*defendant*) *

USA 1956©

93 mins

Digital

* Uncredited

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SPOILER WARNING

 The following notes give away the plot.

Lumet's landmark courtroom drama – which actually takes place in the jury's deliberation chamber – centres on Henry Fonda, typecast but superb as the lone juror who doubts the defendant's guilt and fights a battle of wits against his fellow jurors' various certainties and prejudices. Lumet milks the single-set claustrophobia for all it's worth, and elicits a marvellous clutch of performances from a matchless cast.

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12 Angry Men is about the concept of reasonable doubt. It is the prosecution's burden to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. None of the jurors who voted for acquittal, including Fonda, were convinced of the defendant's innocence. Indeed, the defendant probably was guilty. Let's not forget that he was identified by two eyewitnesses, his alibi was dubious, and the murder weapon was an unusual knife identical to one he had purchased. No suspect other than the defendant ever materialised.

Yet, the many questions and inconsistencies that cropped up during deliberations raised reasonable doubts in the minds of the jurors. Perhaps after all was said and done the odds were 90 to 10 in favour of guilt, yet that was not enough to convict the defendant of murder. Does this make sense? Considering the risk to society from turning a killer loose, is it worth acquitting 90 guilty people in order to avoid convicting ten innocent people? Or even 99 killers to avoid convicting one innocent person?

12 Angry Men may be the best film about jury deliberations ever made. It contains many realistic insights about the jury system. Often, as in this case, jurors resent being stuck with the burdensome task of jury duty. They are paid little for their services. They sit around the jury room waiting to be picked for a jury. If they're lucky, they'll be able to entertain themselves with a 30-year-old jigsaw puzzle missing several pieces. If they're picked as a potential juror, they must answer personal questions that even a daytime TV talk show host would hesitate to ask. Then they have to pay attention during a long and often tedious trial (without getting to hear some of the best bits which occur in the judge's chambers). Then they yawn through the judge's instructions which are phrased in legal mumbo jumbo. Finally, the really unpleasant part begins. The jurors are locked up with some pretty obnoxious personalities in sparse surroundings, especially before the introduction of air-conditioning. And they naturally want to wrap things up and get on with their lives.

In criminal cases, most states require unanimous jury verdicts (split decisions are acceptable only in civil cases and boxing matches). An 11 to one split in a criminal case is a hung jury and the case must be retried (or dismissed if the prosecution elects not to retry it). This means that 12 strangers must try to deliberate until everyone falls into line. Of course, it is very difficult to be a lone holdout, as Fonda was at first; a great amount of character is required to resist when one's co-jurors are sure of their ground and impatient with any additional discussion. But jurors do take their work very seriously and perhaps it is not unheard of for a single sturdy holdout to turn an entire jury around.

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The Draughtsman's Contract

Sun 1 Sep 18:40; Tue 10 Sep 20:30

The Piano

Mon 2 Sep 18:10; Wed 4 Sep 18:00 + intro by Rosie Taylor, Curator, BFI National Archive; Sat 5 Oct 15:45

Les Demoiselles de Rochefort The Young Ladies of Rochefort

Tue 3 Sep 20:30; Sun 15 Sep 12:10; Wed 25 Sep 18:05

Rear Window

Wed 4 Sep 20:45; Sat 7 Sep 12:20; Mon 16 Sep 14:30; Thu 19 Sep 20:45; Wed 2 Oct 18:00 + intro by film and talks programmer & writer Nadia M. Oliva

Do the Right Thing

Thu 5 Sep 18:00; Fri 20 Sep 20:40

12 Angry Men

Fri 6 Sep 20:45; Sat 21 Sep 12:30; Sun 29 Sep 12:30

Le Trou

The Hole
Sat 7 Sep 15:15; Mon 9 Sep 18:00; Sat 5 Oct 20:30

Rio Bravo

Sun 8 Sep 17:45; Sat 28 Sep 14:50

UK Premiere of restoration: The Exterminating

Angel El angel exterminador

Tue 10 Sep 18:20; Wed 25 Sep 18:10 + intro; Tue 8 Oct 20:50

The Miracle Worker

Wed 11 Sep 18:10 + intro by Clare Baines, BFI Inclusion Partner and Founder, Crip Club; Mon 23 Sep 14:30; Fri 27 Sep 18:15; Tue 1 Oct 20:50

Hunger

Thu 12 Sep 20:30; Thu 26 Sep 20:40

Black Narcissus

Fri 13 Sep 14:30; Sun 22 Sep 11:45

Barton Fink

Sat 14 Sep 20:45; Thu 3 Oct 20:45

King of the Hill

Tue 17 Sep 20:45; Fri 4 Oct 18:10

The Servant

Wed 18 Sep 18:15 + intro by Ruby McGuigan, BFI Programme and Acquisitions; Wed 25 Sep 20:45; Sun 6 Oct 12:30

The Incredible Shrinking Man

Tue 24 Sep 20:40; Mon 7 Oct 18:40

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The jury in *12 Angry Men* was not well chosen. The defendant was a person from a minority group, probably Puerto Rican. Yet the jury consisted of 11 white Anglo males and one perhaps Hispanic male. There should have been a much larger minority representation on a jury drawn from a big-city panel. A skilful *voir dire* might have led to peremptory challenges of jurors like Begley and Cobb; on the other hand, they might have successfully covered up their attitudes and got onto the jury.

For all its gritty realism, the film misleadingly portrays important rules governing jury deliberations. Jurors are not supposed to perform experiments or develop evidence on their own. In one notorious evidence case, where the question was how long bite marks would last, one juror bit another one to find out. The appellate court sank its teeth into that one and threw out the conviction. Thus it was improper for Fonda to purchase the knife or to do an experiment about how long it would have taken the old man to run to the door.

Using juries to settle disputes is slow and clumsy and takes precious time from many people. Scratch any trial lawyer, and you'll hear some anecdotes about ridiculous jury verdicts. Of course, you can scratch any juror and hear equally good anecdotes about ridiculous trial lawyers. It would be much quicker and simpler if judges made the decisions – as they do in most legal systems around the world. Many people think the jury system (or at least the requirement of a unanimous verdict) is outmoded. *12 Angry Men* states the best case for keeping the jury system as it is. Juries can serve as the conscience of the community, as one final protection against the risk that the criminal law machine may grind up an innocent person.

Paul Bergman and Michael Asimow, *Reel Justice: The Courtroom Goes to the Movies* (Andrews and McMeel Press, 1996)

'12 Angry Men': a contemporary review

This film, from an original television script and directed by a new director from television, shares the same merits as some other recent, unostentatious films from the same source (*The Young Stranger*, *A Man Is Ten Feet Tall*): some highly convincing, naturalistic characterisations, a fresh look at some vivid, real-life situations and settings. Here, where the action all takes place in the jury room, the emphasis is naturally on character and the interplay of personalities. From their initial indifference to a true moral responsibility (one is anxious to get to a ball game; most have digested only the prosecutor's analysis of the facts) they are one by one drawn into a tighter involvement, a quickened interest to discover the truth of the situation. And on the whole, the general tension and the slow breakdown of the circumstantial evidence, is excellently contrived. The acting (particularly of Martin Balsam as Juror No. 1) is easy and concise, with the exception of Lee J. Cobb's performance as the sadist; and the last few minutes in which Cobb largely figures, represent the only lapse from the high standard elsewhere maintained. Even with this flaw, however, the film remains a compelling and outstandingly well-handled drama.

David Parkinson, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, June 1957