



MEMBER MONDAYS

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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Reginald Rose's *12 Angry Men* teleplay has transferred to film and stage many times, but Sidney Lumet's claustrophobic movie adaptation of 1957, starring Henry Fonda as the lone voice of scepticism and compassion on a settled jury, has endured the best. Fonda brought more than just his star charisma to the piece: he acquired the film rights to Rose's script and deferred his pay cheque so that the shoot could come in under budget. The swift, economical style of TV veteran Lumet was supplemented by striking realist cinematography from Boris Kaufman, and also by a cast who had invested time in workshoping their roles before the cameras turned.

The result is an engrossing real-time drama that thrashes out the angst and antipathies of pre-civil-rights America in a locked room. Fonda's serene mien contrasts with the hotheads – notably Ed Begley's raving bigot – and anxious types who surround him. The camera hangs back at first, but as the tension rises it moves in tighter, as the weather and the lighting transition from the glare of a heatwave to the darkness of a rainstorm.

These dozen adults are battling each other and their own prejudices to decide the fate of a quivering boy accused of murdering his own father. Rose often dwelt on the theme of bigotry, as far as the TV stations would allow. The teenager in question, briefly glimpsed as we follow the jury into their locked room, is Hispanic and lives in a slum, which fires a few prejudices around the table – and sympathies, too, as Jack Klugman's Juror No 5 reveals his own past. However, the toughest nut to crack is Lee J. Cobb's splenetic Juror No 3, paralysed by grief and rage towards his own estranged son. It's possible to see *12 Angry Men* as a cross-generational drama, with a child facing a jury not of his peers, but of distant, older men – reflections of his own father.

Pamela Hutchinson, *Sight and Sound*, June 2017

'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.

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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