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| |  | | --- | |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | Kandel G. Eaton  J.D. is ex-officio newsletter editor for the ABA Committee on International Arms and National Security     |  | | --- | | **Read other reviews:**  [Judge J.H. Sundermann](http://docs.google.com/runawayjury_sundermann.htm)  [Internet Movie Database](http://us.imdb.com/title/tt0313542/)  [All Movie Guide](http://www.allmovie.com/cg/avg.dll?p=avg&sql=1:283035)  [Readers' comments](http://docs.google.com/user_feedback.htm) |         Our deepest fears about lawyers have been illuminated by the lack of importance the courtroom has in the film. All the attorneys put other interests first, and serve their clients only to the extent they profit from such contact. This film is a testimonial to the survival of the most greedy. | |  | | --- | | ***The Runaway Jury***  by Kandel G. Eaton  *God, grant me the serenity*  *to accept the things I cannot change,*  *the courage to change the things I can,*  *and the wisdom to know the difference.*  *--the Serenity Prayer of Alcoholics Anonymous*  As an avid fan of anything written by John Grisham, I was drunk on human sensation and heart-pounding danger. Insurance corporations, angry mobs, the mob, anti-establishment sentiment, assaults, disease and explosions, are all classic Grisham themes. *The Runaway Jury* is excellently produced, directed and best of all, written. It considers the most mundane of civic tasks, jury duty, which is as loathsome and inescapable to us as our daily chores.  The film challenges our common "oops, missed it" attitude about jury duty. And since the film, I've personally discovered the devil in legal process details, and have yet to stop thinking about these characters who have been smoothly shaken (not stirred) by sophisticated individual agendas.  The film opens with a disgruntled ex-stock broker gunning down his colleagues, as seen from the life of Jacob Woods. Dylan McDermott plays the slaughtered victim, who, ironically, was unceremoniously dumped from *the Practice*, a TV show now irredeemable from its glorious past. *The Runaway Jury* also seeks to redeem its violent past. It adds many coincidences of incidents that parallel real life, giving them greater unpredictable dimension. The audience's attention over hunger and thirst is ignored to focus in on its presented issues: Columbine-type flashbacks, unreported legal ethical violations by all parties, and invasions of privacy no government would even think of perpetrating. It is a thrilling sleeper that has me hooked!  Money, as always, is the driving force. It is a curse and addiction, made before by buying a movie ticket and necessary evil for a happy-ever-after box office ending. The film has lived up to its Hollywood hype, but unfortunately the audience isn't buying it in the theater venue. This same philosophic view, ironically, has been put forth inside the film.  As the character Rankin Fitch says "Trials are too important to be left up to juries." This latest masterwork of film is NOT for people who can't think for themselves. They won't appreciate the artistry and talent it took to bring this dull and witless topic to life. All the characters keep the audience wondering what will happen next because they each have so many choices to make, even after they have decided on their particular course of action.  The chameleon protagonist Marlee/Gabrielle portrayed by Rachel Weisz adds a brilliant touch of elegance, and another member to Grisham's growing list of intelligent female characters (at last!). Its true drama involves planted juror Nick Easter (deftly played by coy John Cusack) vs. jury consultant Rankin Fitch (this role is owned by classic humanitur Gene Hackman), not the widow Woods employing New Orleans homeboy Wendell Rohr (guilessly played by the effervescent Dustin Hoffman) to sue the gun manufacturers for loss of consortium.  There are no settlements here, which probably is what would have happened in a real courtroom. Our deepest fears about lawyers have been illuminated by the lack of importance the courtroom has in the film. All the attorneys put other interests first, and serve their clients only to the extent they profit from such contact. This film is a testimonial to the survival of the most greedy.  *The Runaway Jury* ham-handedly deals with gun manufacturers. Oddly none of the characters makes any use of a gun. They break walls and smash windows, set fires, destroy equipment, stalk, photograph, phone, threaten, bribe with millions and cajole at their whims, but not one of the main characters wields a gun. The hot topic of gun control is second to the perpetual confrontations of the characters. As anti-climatic as it may be, selling guns is the raison d'etre for the manipulations to gain power, revenge, and money. But this is only briefly explained after the case is won.  The same trial-style has been done in real life with tobacco cases, and less successfully with pharmaceuticals and alcohol lawsuits. The end of this case is just another moment in a judicial process that can't live up to its promise because its participants see the case only as their opportunity to cash in.  The sides in this film are given early on, the audience need only ponder the "what-ifs," therein eagerly to participate and explore further into its issues. As with all Hollywood endings, the entirety of fixing a jury without being caught comes down to a conscience with multiple directions (similar to string theory in the field of physics) and an astonishing lack of universality that barely avoids preachy moralism. Being right wins the case, retiring the evil and cashing in all in one fell swoop relieves some pain and suffering of the past.  Each victory is fragile and temporary, as life is, as human beings are.  The Serenity Prayer goes on: *"Living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time, accepting hardship as the pathway to peace. Taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it. Trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His will. That I may be reasonably happy in this life, and supremely happy with Him forever in the next. Amen."*  Then, again, for further subornation of process, there is always the  appeal....  Posted November 5, 2003 |   **Would you like to comment on this article? 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