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| **FEATURE ARTICLE** | | | |
| Lesley J. Friedsam is Board Certified in Marital and Family Law and is a partner in the firm of Fields and Friedsam, PA, in Tampa, Florida. Prior to becoming an attorney, she was for ten years a journalist, including seven years as a reporter-anchor for WTVT=TV in Tampa.            **"**  Deeds done long ago that were **"not illegal but wrong"** come to light. The trial becomes a metaphor for justice beyond truth, as Kazuo is both a personal **martyr** and a potential **savior** of the town’s past conduct.    **"** |  |  | **Snow Falling on Cedars**  by Lesley J. Friedsam       Nine years after Pearl Harbor, in a small fishing village in Washington State, a Japanese-American (Rick Yume as Kazuo Miyamoto ) is on trial for killing his white neighbor. A reporter (Ethan Hawke as Ishmael Chambers), who was and is still in love with the defendant's wife ( Youki Kudoh as Hatsue Miyamoto) watches, torn between his still-grieving heart and the specter of his father's life lessons about integrity.     After the prosecutor exhorts the jury to do its duty as Americans , the defense attorney (Max Von Sydow as Nels Gudmundsson) uses the same words but with different meaning. Racial prejudice and lost love are only two of the themes in this rich tapestry of post-war small town America.     This most exquisitely photographed film of the year begins with darkness and fog. We can't see clearly and that is as it should be. The initial sensory deprivation appears to gradually ease, only to segue into a montage of flashbacks and forwards that introduce us to the histories and present day relationships of a father and son, a boy and a girl, a dead fisherman and the man accused of murdering him. In less capable hands, these time and place transitions would be distracting or worse. But the technique keenly reveals the complexity and mystery of the connections between the characters against the backdrop of the murder trial which forms the film's centerpiece.     Before the war, before December 7, 1941 and the resulting the Japanese internment in Manzannar, a young Ishmael falls sweetly in love with Hatsue. Their relationship ignores Hatsue's family pressures to stay within her race and the tacit understanding of place and caste in the small town where a Japanese girl is always chosen to be the Strawberry Princess as a gesture of racial harmony and Japanese can't own land, but instead work stoop-labor in the strawberry fields.     The doomed romance ends when Ishmael goes off to war as his Japanese neighbors are sent into exile, in a chilling scene evocative of *Schindler's List*. At war's end, Hatsue marries Kazuo while Ishmael is adrift, unable to let her go.     One foggy night, while Kazuo is out on his boat, another fisherman dies, tangled in his own fishing net, a suspicious gash in his head. Kazuo is charged.     Ishmael covers the trial and as it progresses, it is clear that Kazuo is not the only defendant; The wartime behavior of the white citizens is also cross-examined. Deeds done long ago that were "not illegal but wrong" come to light. The trial becomes a metaphor for justice beyond truth, as Kazuo is both a personal martyr and a potential savior of the town’s past conduct.     Beyond the easy question of whether Kazuo killed the man for whom he is on trial, another dimension unfolds. Kazuo's guilt could free Hatsue to reclaim her first love, a man whose racial brethren caused their wartime separation and reinforced her family's own racial intolerance.     Meanwhile, Ishmael struggles with an equally compelling conundrum. Does he follow his father’s legacy and uncover the truth, or allow his still wounded heart and neighbors prejudices to prevail?     Kazue may well be guilty; he lied at a critical juncture in the investigation and also has a racially charged motive for the crime: the dead man's parents used the Japanese detainment to handily foreclose on land when payments couldn’t be made. But did Kazue’s lie because he is guilty, or is it because he rightfully fears trusting his previous tormentors?     Based on the novel by David Guterwson, *Snow Falling on Cedars* is beautifully reminiscent of *To Kill A Mockingbird.*     Director Scott Hicks *(Shine)* and Academy Award winning Cinematographer Robert Richardson (*JFK, The Horse Whisperer)* have created breathtaking beauty in the cold snowy scenes that leave prior examples like *Fargo* and *The Ice Storm* wanting by comparison. This hypnotic and atmospheric film won an another Oscar nomination for Richardson, a small piece of justice in an otherwise bleak picture for this film which was poorly reviewed and ill received by a public who prefer easy entertainment.  Posted May 10, 2000                   |  | | --- | |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | |  |  | |  |  | |  |  | |  |  | |  |  | |  |  | |  |  |  |  | | --- | |  | |

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