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### **MOVIE & TRIAL REPORTS**

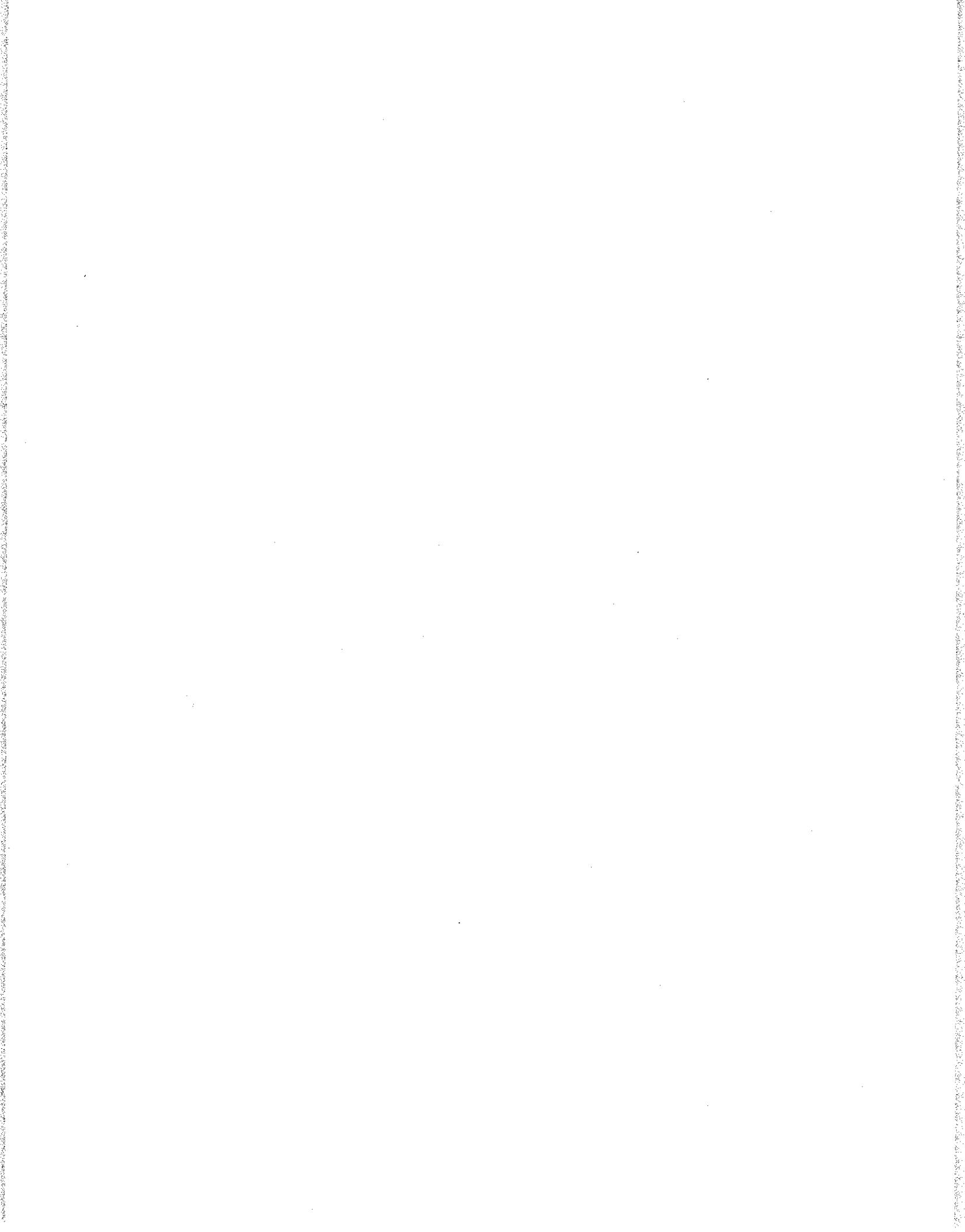
During the last part of the semester, each student will be asked to make a short oral report (about ten minutes) about either 1) a famous trial, or a famous (or at least interesting) movie with some significant legal scenes, hopefully courtroom scenes. Those of you reporting on a movie will be expected to bring a video to class and to play an excerpt for your classmates.

Please do not select a recent movie (of the last 10 years) and do not select a movie already shown in law school (such as *My Cousin Vinny*). The idea is to present to the class some movie that your classmates are not have likely to have seen.

The U.H. Law Library has movies of many famous trials. The Wong Audiovisual Center in the Sinclair Library also has video that you can borrow at no charge. Of course, many students simply rent a video at Blockbusters or some other commercial source.

The next few pages in this section of this handout are either short articles about legal movies or the index of several books about famous trials which may be useful in helping you to select a trial to report on.

In addition, a web search searching for "famous trials" will turn up many hits. One few good web source for such materials is: [www.umkc.edu/famoustrials](http://www.umkc.edu/famoustrials)



*Book Review*

## Evaluating Reel Efforts to Capture the Reality of the Courtroom

BY ELIZABETH ROTH  
LITIGATION NEWS ASSOCIATE EDITOR

*Reel Justice: The Courtroom Goes to the Movies* by Paul Bergman and Michael Asimow. \$14.95. Available from Andrews and McMeel, (800) 826-4216.

*"Scratch almost any lawyer and you'll find a movie buff. That's no coincidence, for the moviemaker's art is not all that different from the lawyer's—especially the courtroom advocate's."* Judge Alex Kozinski

From Jim Carrey to Gregory Peck, lawyers in movies have fascinated audiences for decades. Many portrayals have provided inspiration and instruction to practitioners for years. But which film offers the best fodder for a litigator seeking to imitate art? Two enterprising UCLA School of Law film buffs (oops, I mean law professors) have attempted to address that query.

In *Reel Justice: The Courtroom Goes to the Movies*, Paul Bergman and Michael Asimow rank 69 trial movies on quality, dramatic power, and trial authenticity with a "Gavel Rating System" (4 gavels—a classic; 3 gavels—good; 2 gavels—just okay; 1 gavel—ask for a new trial).

*Reel Justice's* commentary is aimed at lawyers and nonlawyers. It seeks to examine the tactical and ethical issues of films grouped into eight categories:

*"The Story You Are About to See Is True..."*

- "Men in Uniform,"
- "The Lighter Side of Lawsuits,"
- "Heroic Lawyers and Clients,"
- "Don't Become Too Attached to Your Client,"
- "It's Nothing but a Bunch of Circumstantial Evidence,"
- "Unusual Judges and Jurors," and
- "Dollars and Sense."

Not surprisingly, surveyed leaders of the Section of Litigation generally concur with *Reel Justice's* rankings and analysis. The top vote-getters in LITIGATION News's informal poll are the four-gaveled *My Cousin Vinny* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Ignored were the one-gaveled *Sommersby* and *And Justice for All*.

In noting his number one pick of *Mockingbird*, H. Thomas Wells, Jr., Birmingham, AL, explains, "How could an Alabama lawyer pick anything else?" Alan S. Kopit, Cleveland, says "Nothing is even a close second." Citing Gregory Peck's "superb performance," Loren Kieve, Washington, DC, says the film demonstrates "how human dignity can transcend (and maybe even transform) the baser instincts of the social animal."

Many Section leaders regard *My Cousin Vinny* as their favorite film on effective cross-examination. Benjamin R. Civiletti, Baltimore, however, finds that the film has added value. According to Civiletti, it has a "hilarious story line which contained exaggerated but real problems in the administration of justice. For example, the quick leap to guilt of strangers by law enforcement, the hostility of judges to out-of-town lawyers or even those who don't match their preconceptions, and the superficial strength of expert witness testimony which often is flawed."

Of the *Reel Justice* favorites, *Twelve Angry Men*, *Judgment at Nuremberg* and *Inherit the Wind* were also repeatedly cited by Sec-

tion leaders. *Nuremberg*'s Maximilian Schell "would have made a great trial lawyer," notes Robert N. Sayler, Washington, DC. Sayler confesses that he's been watching many lawyer movies lately in connection with the teaching of advocacy. Darryl W.

Jackson, Washington, DC, picks *Twelve Angry Men* because of its demonstration of "the powers that one individual has as a guardian of liberty," especially now as we debate "whether our criminal justice system should be reformed so we can convict more quickly through the use of non-unanimous juries."

*Many Section leaders regard My Cousin Vinny as their favorite film on effective cross-examination.*

Professor Stephan Landsman, Chicago, also ranks *Twelve Angry Men* as one of the best lawyer movies, but finds it "wildly inaccurate about jury behavior."

**United States District Judge**

Marvin E. Aspen, Chicago, nominates three-gaveled *The Ox-Bow Incident* as his all-time favorite lawyer movie, even

though it "features neither a courtroom or lawyers." Aspen feels "the film has more insight into what justice is all about and the rationale for the rule of law than any of the more traditional courtroom films."

### **Reel Justice's Gavel Ratings**

#### **Four Gavels**

Anatomy of a Murder	Inherit the Wind	My Cousin Vinny
Breaker Morant	Judgment at Nuremberg	To Kill a Mockingbird
Caine Mutiny	Libel	Twelve Angry Men
The Fury	Life of Emile Zola	Witness for the Prosecution
	A Man for All Seasons	

#### **Three Gavels**

Adam's Rib	A Few Good Men	Paths of Glory
The Advocate	I Want to Live	A Place in the Sun
Bananas	In the Name of the Father	Presumed Innocent
Beyond a Reasonable Doubt	Knock on Any Door	Prisoners of the Sun
Billy Budd	Kramer v. Kramer	10 Rillington Place
Boomerang	Let Him Have It	Thin Blue Line
Compulsion	The Letter	They Won't Believe Me
Court Martial of Billy Mitchell	Losing Isaiah	They Won't Forget
A Cry in the Dark	M	Trial
Devil and Daniel Webster	Miracle on 34th Street	Trial by Jury
	Mr. Deeds Goes to Town	Whose Life is It, Anyway?
	Nuts	The Wrong Man
	Onion Field	Young Mr. Lincoln
	The Ox-Bow Incident	The Young Philadelphians

#### **Two Gavels**

The Accused	Jagged Edge	The Star Chamber
An Act of Murder	Murder in the First	Suspect
Class Action	The Music Box	The Verdict
Guilty as Sin	On Trial	
I Confess	The Paradine Case	
It Could Happen to You	Philadelphia	... And Justice for All
	Reversal of Fortune	Sommersby

#### **One Gavel**

# GREAT AMERICAN TRIALS

## Edward W. Knappman

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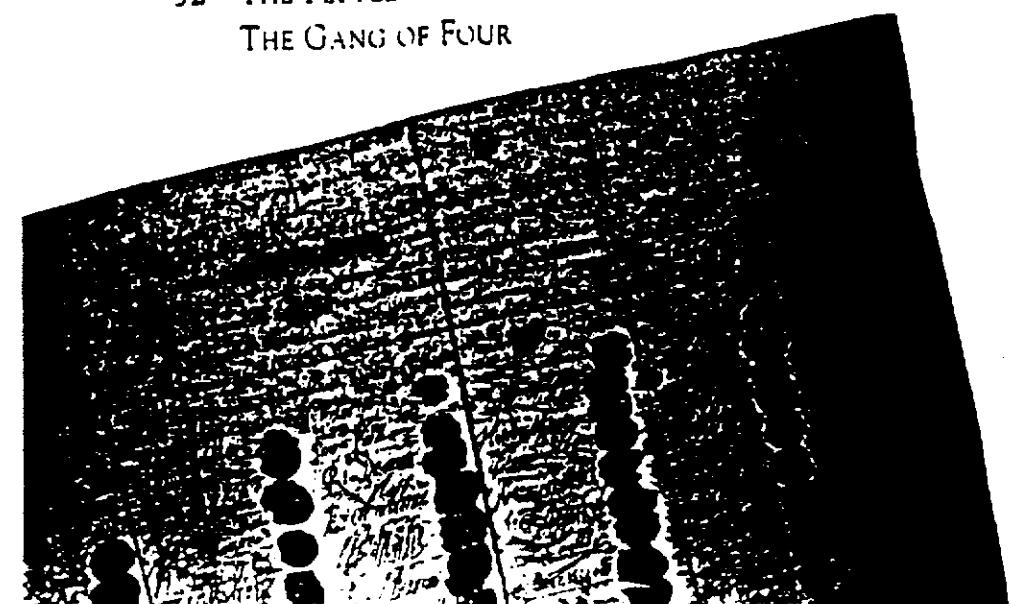
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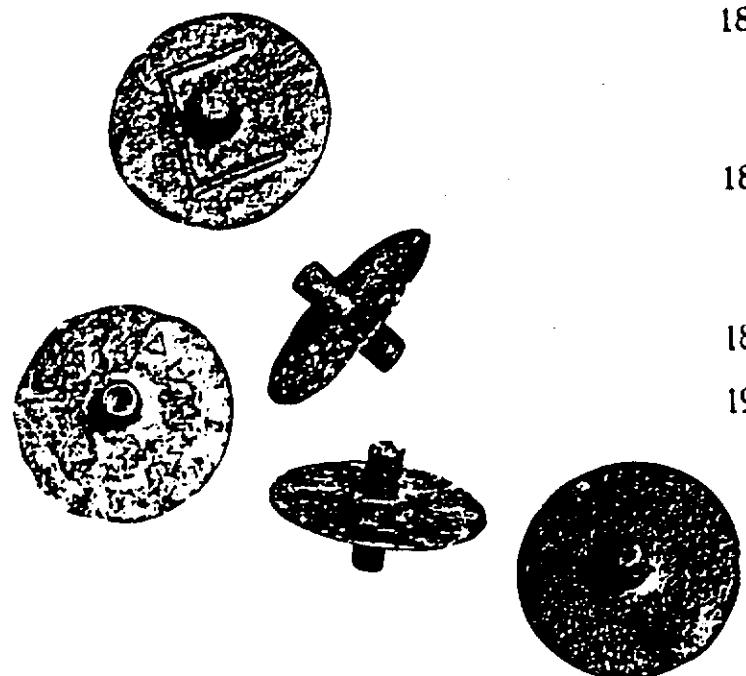
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CONTRIBUTORS 303

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**Famous Trials WEB SITE**  
[www.umkc.edu/famoustrials](http://www.umkc.edu/famoustrials)

Here are just a few of the famous trials reviewed

*Scopes "Monkey" Trial (1925)*

Rosenberg Trial (1951)

*Leopold and Loeb Trial (1924)*

Salem Witchcraft Trials (1692)

*Scottsboro Trials (1931-1937)*

*Bill Haywood Trial (1907)*

*My Lai Courts Martial (1970)*

*Nuremberg Trials (1945-49)*

*Dakota Conflict Trials (1862)*

*Mississippi Burning Trial (1967)*

*Chicago Seven Conspiracy Trial (1969-70)*

*Johnson Impeachment Trial (1868)*

*O. J. Simpson Trial (1995)*

The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde (1895).

*Hauptmann (Lindbergh) Trial (1935)*

*Sweet Trials (1925 & 26)*

*Amistad Trials (1839-1840)*

*Sheriff Shipp Trial (1907-09)*

*Susan Anthony Trial (1873)*

*Black Sox Trial (1921)*

*Sacco-Vanzetti Trial (1921)*

*John Zenger Trial (1735)*