

FROM COURTROOM TO CELULOID: Famous Trials Made Into Films

Ever since Socrates was put on trial for “impiety” and “corrupting the youth” more than 2,500 years many of history’s greatest dramas have taken place not on the stage, but in the courtroom. Every generation claims to have its “Trial of the Century” – a crime and legal proceeding which captivates and remains on the front pages for weeks if not months. Since the dawn of film, many of these trials have been the fodder for movies. Often, what we *believe* we know about a famous case is based not on what transpired in the courtroom . . . but rather what was committed to celluloid.

This series will look at four famous trials in a most unique way. One week we will study the crime, the principals in that crime, and the actual trial. A week later, armed with the historic record, we will screen a film version of that crime and its ensuing trial. Through this process of going “from courtroom to celluloid,” we will hopefully learn not only about four famous trials, but something about the nature of dramatic license – of what historic kernels are sacrificed in the milling of dramatic wheat.

1. **Courtroom: The Trial of Leo Frank (1913)** Leo Frank, a Jewish factory foreman in Atlanta is tried for the murder of young Mary Phagen.
2. **Celluloid: They Won’t Forget (1937) Starring** Claude Rains, Otto Kruger and in her film debut, Lana Turner.
3. **Courtroom: The Trial of Leopold and Loeb (1924):** Two wealthy, brilliant Chicago area teens are tried for the thrill killing of a young neighbor.
4. **Celluloid: *Compulsion* (1959)** Starring Bradford Dillman, Dean Stockwell and Orson Welles. Based on a novel by Meyer Levin.
5. **Courtroom: The Scopes “Monkey” Trial (1925):** Tennessee high school teacher John Thomas Scopes was arrested and tried for the crime of teaching evolution in his biology class.
6. **Celluloid: *Inherit the Wind* (1960)** Spencer Tracy, Fredric March, Gene Kelly; an acting tour-de-force. Directed by Stanley Kramer
7. **Courtroom: The Trial of Adolf Eichmann (1961):** Nearly 15 years after the conclusion of WWII, the Israelis found the man who ran the Nazi extermination machine, Adolf Eichmann, living in Argentina. He was spirited back to Israel and put tried for genocide and crimes against humanity.
8. **Celluloid: *The Man in the Glass Booth* (1975)** Starring Maximilian Schell, Luther Adler and Lois Nettleton; directed by Arthur Hiller.