



12 Angry Men (1957) is the gripping, penetrating, and engrossing examination of a diverse group of twelve jurors (all male, mostly middle-aged, white, and generally of middle-class status) who are uncomfortably brought together to deliberate after hearing the 'facts' in a seemingly open-and-shut murder trial case. They retire to a jury room to do their civic duty and serve up a just verdict for the indigent minority defendant (with a criminal record) whose life is in the balance. The film is a powerful indictment, denouncement and expose of the trial by jury system. The frightened, teenaged defendant is on trial, as well as the jury and the American judicial system with its purported sense of infallibility, fairness and lack of bias.

Alternatively, the film could also be viewed as commentary on McCarthyism, Fascism, or Communism (threatening forces in the 50s). This was television-trained director Sidney Lumet's first feature film - a low-budget (\$350,000) film shot in only 17 days from a screenplay by Reginald Rose, who based his script on his own teleplay of the same name. After the initial airing of the TV play in early 1954 on Studio One CBS-TV, co-producer/star Henry Fonda asked Rose in 1956 if the teleplay could be expanded to feature-film length (similar to what occurred to Paddy Chayefsky's TV play *Marty* (1955)), and they became co-producers for the project (Fonda's sole instance of film production).

The jury of twelve 'angry men,' entrusted with the power to send an uneducated, teenaged Puerto Rican, tenement-dwelling boy to the electric chair for killing his father with a switchblade knife, are literally locked into a small, claustrophobic rectangular jury room on

a stifling hot summer day until they come up with a unanimous decision - either guilty or not guilty. The compelling, provocative film examines the twelve men's deep-seated personal prejudices, perceptual biases and weaknesses, indifference, anger, personalities, unreliable judgments, cultural differences, ignorance and fears, that threaten to taint their decision-making abilities, cause them to ignore the real issues in the case, and potentially lead them to a miscarriage of justice.

One Brave Juror: Fortunately, one brave dissenting juror votes 'not guilty' at the start of the deliberations because of his reasonable doubt. Persistently and persuasively, he forces the other men to slowly reconsider and review the shaky case (and eyewitness testimony) against the endangered defendant.

He also chastises the system for giving the unfortunate defendant an inept 'court-appointed' public defense lawyer who "resented being appointed" - a case with "no money, no glory, not even much chance of winning" - and who inadequately cross-examined the witnesses. Heated discussions, the formation of alliances, the frequent re-evaluation and changing of opinions, votes and certainties, and the revelation of personal experiences, insults and outbursts fill the jury room.

This classic, black and white film has been accused of being stagey, static and dialogue-laden. It has no flashbacks, narration, or subtitles. The camera is essentially locked in the enclosed room with the deliberating jurors for 90 of the film's 95 minutes, and the film is basically shot in real-time in an actual jury room. Cinematographer Boris Kaufman uses diverse camera angles (a few dramatic, grotesque closeups and mostly well-composed medium-shots) to illuminate and energize the film's cramped proceedings. Except for Henry Fonda, the ensemble character actors were chosen for their experience in the burgeoning art of television.

None of the jurors are named, and they don't formally introduce themselves to each other (except for two of them in the final brief ending). Jurors are labeled with numbers based on their jury numbers and seats at a conference table in the jury room (in clock-wise order).

The Twelve Jurors : A summary of the anonymous characters helps to flesh out their characters and backgrounds. The order in which each eventually decides to vote "not guilty" is given in brackets:

- **Juror #1** (The Foreman): (Martin Balsam) A high-school assistant head coach, doggedly concerned to keep the proceedings formal and maintain authority; easily frustrated and sensitive when someone objects to his control; inadequate for the job as foreman, not a natural leader and over-shadowed by Juror # 8's natural leadership
- **Juror #2:** (John Fiedler) A wimpy, balding bank clerk/teller, easily persuaded, meek, hesitant, goes along with the majority, eagerly offers cough drops to other men during tense times of argument; better memory than # 4 about film title
- **Juror #3:** (Lee J. Cobb) Runs a messenger service (the "Beck and Call" Company), a bullying, rude and husky man, extremely opinionated and biased, completely intolerant, forceful and loud-mouthed, temperamental and vengeful; estrangement from his own teenaged son causes him to be hateful and hostile toward all young people (and the defendant); arrogant, quick-angered, quick-to-convict, and defiant until the very end
- **Juror #4:** (E. G. Marshall) Well-educated, smug and conceited, well-dressed stockbroker, presumably wealthy; studious, methodical, possesses an incredible recall and grasp of the facts of the case; common-sensical, dispassionate, cool-headed and rational, yet stuffy and prim; often displays a stern glare; treats the case like a puzzle to be deductively solved rather than as a case that may send the defendant to death; claims that he never sweats
- **Juror #5:** (Jack Klugman) Naive, insecure, frightened, reserved; grew up in a poor Jewish urban neighborhood and the case resurrected in his mind that slum-dwelling upbringing; a guilty vote would distance him from his past; nicknamed "Baltimore" by Juror # 7 because of his support of the Orioles
- **Juror #6:** (Edward Binns) A typical "working man," dull-witted, experiences difficulty in making up his own mind, a follower; probably a manual laborer or painter; respectful of older juror and willing to back up his words with fists
- **Juror #7:** (Jack Warden) Clownish, impatient salesman (of marmalade the previous year), a flashy dresser, gum-chewing, obsessed baseball fan who wants to leave as soon as possible to attend evening game; throws wadded up paper balls at the fan; uses baseball metaphors and references throughout all his statements (he tells the foreman to "stay in there and pitch"); lacks complete human concern for the defendant and for the immigrant juror; extroverted; keeps up amusing banter and even impersonates James Cagney at one point; votes with the majority
- **Juror #8:** (Henry Fonda) An architect, instigates a thoughtful reconsideration of the case against the accused; symbolically clad in white; a liberal-minded, patient truth-and-justice seeker who uses soft-spoken, calm logical reasoning; balanced, decent, courageous, well-spoken and concerned; considered a do-gooder (who is just wasting others' time) by some of the prejudiced jurors; named Davis
- **Juror #9:** (Joseph Sweeney) Eldest man in group, white-haired, thin, retiring and resigned to death but has a resurgence of life during deliberations; soft-spoken but perceptive, fair-minded; named McCardle
- **Juror #10:** (Ed Begley) A garage owner, who simmers with anger, bitterness, racist bigotry; nasty, repellent, intolerant, reactionary and accusative; segregates the world into 'us' and 'them'; needs the support of others to reinforce his manic rants
- **Juror #11:** (George Voskovec) A watchmaker, speaks with a heavy accent, of German-European descent, a recent refugee and immigrant; expresses reverence and respect for American democracy, its system of justice, and the infallibility of the Law
- **Juror #12:** (Robert Webber) Well-dressed, smooth-talking business ad man with thick black glasses; doodles cereal box slogan and packaging ideas for "Rice Pops"; superficial, easily-swayed, and easy-going; vacillating, lacks deep convictions or belief system; uses advertising talk at one point: "run this idea up the flagpole and see if anybody salutes it"