

**MORE THAN ETHICAL QUANDARIES  
AND  
WORLDWIDE CONSPIRACIES:  
USING POPULAR NON-LEGAL  
CULTURE TO UNDERSTAND  
LEGAL CULTURE**

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Law and Popular Culture focuses on popular legal culture: courtroom dramas or movies about lawyer/lawyer proxies. These “legal” films almost exclusively concentrate on the attorney, and, consequently, its area of study is limited to areas such as the attorney/client relationship, legal ethics, the life of a lawyer, and the stresses of being involved in a global conspiracy that implicates everyone from paralegals to the President. From the earliest films in the genre (such as *Counsellor at Law*) to more recent ones (such as *The Lincoln Lawyer*), the attorney usually retains central importance.

However, the law is more than the lawyer. The law is more than even the judges, the plaintiffs, the defendants, the juries, the courtroom, the statutes, and the trials. Law is law itself, an abstract concept with real significance in the way that it affects the

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actions of people, corporations, and governments. Unfortunately, popular legal culture rarely looks into broader and more philosophical jurisprudential concepts. However, movies that do not involve litigation or even feature an attorney may offer something deeper to the individuals studying law (or Law and Popular Culture) than the confines of an appellate decision or the tried-and-true formula of the job-hating attorney in the midst of an existential crisis.

This paper shows how viewing and examining a “legal” film can be enriched by pairing it with a “non-legal” film. Legal films broach some subjects, but “non-legal” films lead to a deeper understanding of certain issues because these movies are not constrained by “legal” film conventions. When chosen and used properly, “non-legal” films complement the “legal” films by taking the viewer into the weightier realms that underlie the basis behind our entire justice system and, thus, serve to enhance our cultural understanding of the law.

This article focuses on four different law-related topics and compares a “legal” film with a “non-legal” film to show how the “non-legal” film enriches the understanding of the “legal” film’s legal and jurisprudential concepts. Hopefully, this

device expands Law and Popular Culture's reach by encouraging scholars, teachers, and students to find different and more substantial ways to deepen their appreciation and, therefore, enhance the value of the Law and Popular Culture field.

Section II, titled Legal Philosophy, provides a basic introduction to some abstract legal ideas and gives basic examples of how "legal" and "non-legal" films show complementary facets of the same concepts. Then, this section takes one specific theory, namely natural law, and examines how it exists under a "God" theory by applying it to the "legal" film *A Man for All Seasons* and the "non-legal" film *A Serious Man*. Subsequently, the article uses the "legal" film *Judgment at Nuremberg* and the "non-legal" film *Nixon* to examine natural law without considering God's presence. Section III focuses on Criminal Law with the more practical and relatable concepts of punishment and guilt. This article considers punishment by comparing the "legal" film *M.* and the "non-legal" film *A Clockwork Orange*. Further, this article reaches a better understanding of both emotional and legal guilt by combining the "legal" film *Reversal of Fortune* with the "non-legal" film *Crimes and Misdemeanors*. Finally, Section IV offers a Conclusion that briefly discusses the

importance of film on the cultural landscape and how it can be better used in Law and Popular Culture.