

Argumentative essay about 12 angry men a

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



12 Angry Men, originally a play in 1954, then made into a movie in 1957, has easily stood the test of time. In an era when the studios and the public were more inclined towards major Technicolor productions with multimillion dollar budgets, over 90% of the movie takes place in a single a setting; the jury deliberation room where, in real time, the viewer is given a no nonsense approach to the many aspects of group decision making, standing up alone for one's beliefs and overriding the ideology of the day concerning minorities and the poor in order to see the truth; the truth the majority of the twelve jurors did not wish to see. Also, how group process comes into play within the diverse make up of the jurors: How each juror acts differently in the group than how we are led to believe they would act alone.

12 Angry Men tells the story of twelve jurors thrust together in a hot and humid room on a New York summer evening to deliberate on the guilt or innocence of an eighteen year old Hipic boy with a troubled past. He is accused of stabbing his father; a man with whom he has had a contentious relationship for years. The accused is fighting an uphill battle towards an acquittal: the eye witness account of his neighbors, a court appointed public defender whose apathy towards this case is mirrored by more than one of the jurors and his race which seems to be a major strike against him in the mind of some of the jurors, specifically juror #10.

From the onset, it seems like an open and shut case with the accused being sentenced to death for the murder of his father. But if that were the case, 12 Angry Men, with its study of human contrasts, inconsistencies and prejudices, would have been long forgotten. Instead, 12 Angry Men is a testament to the notion that standing up for ones beliefs that have come

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from an unbiased and methodical overview of the facts, even if those beliefs are contrary to the vocal majority, is honorable and that such prejudices which cloud those facts are an impediment to every citizen in a democratic society.

Being forced to listen to six days of testimony while at the same time being paid only three dollars a day for their services, it is easy to see how some or most of the jurors at the beginning of deliberations, seemed apathetic towards the great responsibility they have to give the accused their undivided attention while deciding his guilt or innocence. This is the case for a number of jurors; specifically juror #7 who is preoccupied with making the Yankee/Indians game later that day.

He feels rushed by the proceedings and desires quick deliberations followed by a unanimous guilty vote. He feels that the accused is guilty but most likely would have voted the way of the majority if that meant that he could have gone to the game, gone home or just been anywhere other than in the courtroom for any additional length of time. He does not see and cannot be affectively reminded about the awesome power he has to either put a man to death or to set him free. The issue of the guilt or innocence of the accused should be paramount in his mind but sadly, it is not.

Juror #5 is not the only one who shrinks from his responsibility. Juror #12, the well dressed and jovial salesman feels that the accused is guilty but when pressed to explain his reasoning, cannot and quickly changes his mind when pressured to do so. Juror #12 is preoccupied with his job and maintaining a light atmosphere in the jury room; almost oblivious to the

matter at hand. Juror #2 is in many ways, the same as juror #12 except for the fact that his personality is not nearly as outgoing but in the same way, lacks convictions and is content to go with the crowd. He does not take his civic duty seriously and is afraid to stand up against the crowd unlike juror #8; the lone dissenter at the beginning of the film.

Also, juror #2 does not seem to be able to explain why he feels that the accused is either innocent or guilty. This is contrary to jurors #3, #4 and #10 who at the start of the movie, have no qualms about putting the accused to death and detailing exactly why they feel that the boy should be worthy of such a fate. The remaining three holdouts all have different reasons why they think the boy is guilty; some are legitimate concerns while others are rooted in prejudice against the poor and minorities.

Although misguided, the above mentioned jurors had the conviction to state specifically why they thought what they did and to be perfectly willing for a time and to stand up to what is becoming a numerous and vocal majority as the movie progresses. Jurors #2, and #10 are either too preoccupied to be bothered by the tremendous power they have over the accused, or are too timid and will go with the majority. For that reason, he is among the jurors that did not take their civic responsibility as seriously as they needed to.

Jurors #5, #9 and of course #8 are polar opposites of the above mentioned jurors. At the beginning of the film, only juror #8 votes for the innocence of the accused. Or rather there is reasonable doubt as to the guilt of the accused in his mind. But juror #8, by his own admission, reluctantly stands alone in defiance to the other eleven jurors.

He does not do this while void of fear. It is seen on his face, in his mannerisms and even when he is willing to vote with the majority if after a short deliberation and a second vote, he is still the lone dissenter. Juror #8 is skeptical about many aspects of this boy's life; his childhood and especially the system that would allow such a boy to fall through the cracks and almost invite this type of behavior (had he been guilty) and feels that an intense and methodical discussion is warranted before he is to vote for the guilt and subsequent death of a fellow human being.

This type of moral fortitude, courage and attention to duty goes rewarded by juror #9; the oldest juror who once he has a companion, has no trouble standing up to the intense verbal ridicule of the majority, specifically juror #3, #7, #10. By this act, the group process's momentum slowly starts to shift away from rendering a guilty verdict to instead empowering those timid jurors who have doubt as to the guilt of the accused but were too afraid to speak as they knew that they could not handle the onslaught levied against them by jurors #3 and #10. The jury room consists of polar opposites when it comes to their fulfillment of their duty in this matter. It is not the specific vote that they cast that makes them the most different, but in the way that they came to that decision.

Each juror possessed a different decision making process concerning how they voted, how quickly they changed their vote and how resistant others were to let "one of them" go free. It is very rare for twelve different people to be completely impartial and void of any prejudices.

This was the case especially for juror #3. He is the last of the jurors to change his vote to not guilty and in order for him to do so, a great deal of internal and personal problems and frustrations must be overcome for him to change his vote. Juror #3 is a traditional, hard nosed individual who taught himself to be tough as well as his son, remarking that when his only son was nine and walked away from a fight, it made him sick and he resolved to make a man out of his son. At the time of the trial, his son is twenty two and it is safe to say that they have a contentious relationship for the past few years.

The son, most likely, resisted the intense tactics of his father and they have not spoken in years. This has caused the father a great deal of pain and this pain served as the main source of the father's hatred for the accused. Juror #3 sees a correlation between the accused and his son and exerts little effort to disguise that bias. The accused had a troubled relationship with his father as well. Juror #3 sees both the accused and his son as being ungrateful to their fathers and feels that there should be consequences for this disrespect.

He seems to have no power over his son for if he did, they would be reconciled or at least there would be visits between them. But he does have power over the accused to put him to death for what his hatred tells him that the boy must obviously be guilty. The accused stands for everything that juror #3 hates and coupled with his tough exterior, is the last to submit to letting the accused go free.

On the opposite end of the spectrum are jurors #11, 5 and 8. Juror #11 is a watch maker from Eastern Europe. Even though he is Caucasian, he is conscious of his ethnicity and the prejudices that come with being from a different country. He sympathizes with the accused and how his ethnic background puts him at a disadvantage in almost every aspect of daily life in 1950's America.

At the beginning of the movie, he agrees with the majority regarding the guilt of the accused but the racist generalizations made by jurors #7 and 10 are very effective in showing juror #11 that there are certain prejudices in play that need to be examined. Along with the methodical explanation by juror #8, the watchmaker changes his vote to not guilty and does not waver for the rest of the movie despite intense pressure from juror #7 and #10 to convince him of the contrary and to play on the fears the watchmaker has of being different.

Also motivated by the obvious shift in the group process away from the ideology that encourages a guilty verdict, the above mentioned jurors do all that they can to slow the momentum. The way in which the watchmaker comes to his decisions in a non biased, sympathetic and dutiful process and is willing to absorb ridicule against the prejudices of jurors # 3 and 10; some of the same prejudices which force them to be the last to change their vote, is honorable and worthy of mention; second only to that of juror #8, the lone dissenter.

The movie wastes no time in pointing out who will emerge the leaders in the jury room. One would think that naturally, the foreman would be selected as

the leader and that the proceeding would be run under his watchful eye. But that is not the case. The foreman has no such ambition and is quick to offer his seat to anyone who thinks that they might be able to do a better job once an argument arises on how the deliberations would be conducted.

By the simple yet courageous action of juror #8 to vote not guilty by a show of hands, while knowing that such an action would be the source of ridicule, quickly makes him as one of the leaders in the jury room. Juror #8 becomes the leader by not only being the sole dissenter in the face of ridicule but in the way that he reacts to that ridicule; through a quiet, confident and respectful resolve which earns him not only respect from people who are not used to such treatment, but also converts to his call for a complete examination of the facts. It is this unbiased and caring demeanor that helps his argument to have legitimacy unlike the boisterous juror #3 and #10 whose demeanor steadily helps them to lose converts until they are the only ones left.

On the other end of the spectrum are jurors #3 and #10. It is obvious that they have ulterior motives in seeing the accused gets the electric chair. They are tough on crime, short on compassion and frequent on racist generalizations which cloud their mind and sour their soul with such hateful rhetoric. These prejudices come busting out towards the end of the movie when jurors #3 and #10 are the most desperate as they are now left alone with the intense eyes of jurors who at the beginning of their deliberations, supported their discriminatory ideology by voting for the guilt of the accused.

Once the support has been eroded, their actions, like the actions of juror #3, set them apart as they infamously emerge as the other leaders in the jury room. The fact that juror #3 allows his frustrations with his son to come into play with his judgment towards the guilt of the accused and that he his mannerisms are so over the top, helps him emerge as the other main leader in the jury room. His prejudice lies in the age of the accused being close to that of his own son with whom he has had a troubled relationship and a troubled past. Juror #3 may or may not hate his son but he is very discouraged and displeased with the way that things have gone in their relationship and vents his frustration towards the accused.

The prejudice of juror #10 lies not in the age of the accused by rather in his race. The accused is a Latino who grew up in the poor tenements of New York where crime runs rampant and juror #10 feels that the accused is guilty by association since he came from such squalor and with a troubled past. However, juror #10 is not nearly as vocal in his suspicion of juror #5 who grew up in a similar atmosphere simply because the juror is white. It is more the race of the accused than where he grew up that seems to motivate juror #10 into the assumption that the boy is guilty.

At first, it is the outspoken demeanor of juror #10 that helps to set him apart from the other jurors in a leadership role. But his leadership emerges in more infamous ways as he vocalizes his racist assumptions of the accused in one final and desperate outburst as he desperately tried to win back converts to his cause. He uses such words as “ those people” and “ you know how they are” and finally, the accused is “ one of them.”

The phrases are used at the beginning of the movie and assumed as fact in the mind of juror #10 mostly due to the fact that his only opposition is from juror #8 who is not being taken seriously and is no threat to him. However, when the group process shows that juror #10 is in a shrinking majority and will soon be a lone standout, along with juror #3, the same phrases are used desperately but to no avail.

The main source for the drama in the jury room is the requirement that their decision must be unanimous. If for the simple fact that everyone must be in agreement in either sending the accused to his death or setting him free, there would have been no screenplay to begin with. The jurors might have argued the merits of the case but with there being no need for a unanimous decision, juror #8 would have known that unless he could win six more converts in what would have to be a short amount of time, the deliberations would soon be over.

The ulterior motives of jurors #3 and #10 would never have seen the light of day. The lack of conviction displayed by jurors #1 #2 and #12 would never had been recognized and the heroic actions of juror #8 and to a lesser extent juror #9, would never had sparked such heated yet important and necessary debate within the jury room. Every man left the jury room a little different than when they first came. Jurors #2, #5, #11 and #12 may have been emboldened in their private lives and to let future injustices not slide as easily as they may have had in the past. Jurors #3, #10 and to a lesser extent #7, recognized their prejudices and may have exerted some effort to confront these problems.

The phrase “ group process” refers to the behavior of people in groups, such as task groups that are trying to solve a problem or make a decision. 12 Angry Men has numerous and obvious examples of group process. It is the fact that twelve men must come to a unanimous decision that such examples can be shown. If there were only one or two jurors and/or a unanimous decision did not have to be achieved, any aspect of group process would have been absent.

The jurors can be grouped into three main groups: those who are strongly in favor of giving the accused the electric chair, those who are willing to go along with the majority and those who are strongly in favor of being oblivious from the glaring prejudices and racist assumptions and quickly latch onto the moralist; juror #8 and then #9. Jurors #2 #5 and #11 are beneficiaries of group process. They cannot do alone what is made easier in a group once jurors #8 and #9 have voted for the innocence of the accused.

Alone, they could never have done what #8 and #9 had done: stand up to vocal ridicule and to do it alone. But once the first step has been made towards an attempt to judge the facts and not the race, age or background of the accused, jurors #2, #5 and #11 are relieved to vote their consciousness instead of giving into the pressure levied against them by specifically jurors #3 #4 and #10. The negative aspects of group process would have been guilty for defective decision making if it hadn't been for the fact that juror #8 has the courage to vote for the innocence of the accused.

12 Angry Men will continue to stand the test of time since it speaks eloquently on many different areas: that prejudices are an impediment to

everyone in a democratic society and that standing up for a belief, despite knowing the dangers of such a stand, is honorable and should be recognized as courageous. But also, people do in groups what they wouldn't do in private. Individuality within a group of strong opinions comes at a price and that price is most often ridicule and misunderstanding. If at the beginning of the movie, the foreman had taken a secret vote, juror #8 may not have been the lone dissenter.

The jurors that did not put a great deal of value in the democratic process of trial by jury and didn't feel that a daily salary of \$3 was not worthy of their methodical analysis of the facts, were content to go with the majority, no matter what that decision said. But for the jurors who made it a point to shift group process away from a guilty verdict based on racist assumptions and in light of strong ridicule and little monetary compensation, this movie will continue to be studied and appreciated for years to come.