

Movie interpretation "12 angry men" essay sample

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



This film was first released in 1957, and was directed by Sidney Lumet. This is a, 'one of a kind' film; a gripping drama based on a murder case that is fought by a team of 12 jurors. The defendant in this film is a young Puerto Rican teenager, who is facing a trial for the alleged murder of his father. This young teenager is shown only briefly in the beginning, and for rest of the time the audience perceives the defendant only through the descriptions given by the 12 jurors during their discussions. This perception gradually and imperceptibly changes during the course of the film. This film is a powerful representation of the trial by jury system, which has an engrossing cross-examination by 12 jurors who are appointed, or rather entrusted with the power to send a young teenager to the electric chair.

The juror team is an all white panel of middle aged, middle class men in whose hands

the life and future of an uneducated and poor boy is lying. The film has a socio psychological message to it, which confirms to the audience that each and every juror has a personal revelation to make, as the insults and outbursts fill the courtroom.

The scared teenager stands facing the American Judicial System with all its ostensible

infallibility, and 'supposedly unbiased approach' and is at the mercy of the 12 Angry Men, with some of their verdicts being overly personal and exaggerated .

Metaphorically speaking, the 12 men represent dynamites, ready to explode.

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As one of the film posters of those days described that the judicial system can be quite dangerous if left in hands of people whose decision making abilities are doubtful due to their personal prejudices, indifferences, biases, unpredictable anger, variable judgments, ignorance and fears. Such a group of juries can only lead to a tainted justice in what seems like a ' Open and Shut' murder case, but in reality is a matter of life and death for a young teenager.

As the one of the promotional poster of this film said, " Life is in their hands- Death is on their minds. It explodes like 12 sticks of dynamite."

The 12 Angry Men do explode like dynamites as the film gains momentum towards its

Climax. Locked in a small claustrophobic room on a hot summer day, they are shown to forget the real issue and air their deep seated prejudices by being angry and getting out of focus. Fortunately one rebellious juror had some reasonable doubts and he votes " not guilty" at the start of the discussions and quite persistently he forces the other men to reconsider the rather unsteady case, which was going against the defendant.

In this film the entire build up of tension comes from the gestures and body language of the jurors, from their personality conflicts, dialogues and from a slowly unfolding drama. There is no action or flashback in the film, and the entire film is shot mainly in a stuffy room where the 12 angry men live out their personality quirks, personal opinions and their fragmented sense of justice.

The film is thin on content, but has created a masterpiece by stylized photography and some sensible editing. It is more about a defenseless young man who is facing death for an alleged crime. The film comes up with a number of socio psychological angles that turns it into a revelation of many shades of a person's character and it also reveals how so many death row convictions are often based on false evidences.

This compelling film quite provocatively examines the twelve men's deep seated personal prejudices and racial biases also, as they argue among themselves about the murder trial. If seen from a psychological point of view, the film very strongly represents some socio psychological principles that can be briefly categorized as:

Conflict theory, Cognitive dissonance and Modern Racism.

Conflict Theory pertains to an underlying struggle for a group or individual within a society to maximize its own benefits. This struggle inevitably contributes to social changes such as changes in politics and revolution. This theory was founded by Karl Marx, and later developed by other theorists such as Marx Weber etc. The theory refutes the concept of functionalism, which considers that society functions so that each individual and group must play a specific role akin to body organs. The true essence of conflict theory is best described by a pyramid. The one at the top is the one that dictates power to those at the base or the lower level of the pyramid.

All laws and institutions are basically created to support those who are in power.

Conflict theory is perennially reflected in gender, politics, race and crime all around us.

In the film, this principle is reflected starkly in the arguments of the jurors.

The twelve jurors are arguing a case of a poor lower middle class teenager who also has a criminal record and some witnesses against him. One of the courts appointed public defense lawyer is resentful of the fact that he is appointed to a case which has " no money, no glory and also little chances of winning." He cross-examines the defendant " inadequately " because of his resentment towards the penury of the defendant. The jurors have diverse opinions because they are biased towards the defenseless and rather endangered defendant.

The reason why the defendant is shown only briefly at the beginning of the trial and later is presented only as an individual perception of the jurors reinstates the theory.

Coming to Cognitive Dissonance, we can see that this is a psychological term that describes the uncomfortable tension that results from having two conflicting thoughts at the same time. It explains why some people behave in opposition to what they actually believe. A person may support the ban on slaughter of animals but still would eat meat, thus being in a state of cognitive dissonance. This theory states that contradicting cognition serve as driving force that compels a person's mind to acquire new thoughts or beliefs. The film has many such instances where this theory comes into being. For instance one of the juror persuasively forces other jury members

to reconsider their opinions regarding the defendants case. He votes "not guilty" and finally the jurors are forced to review the case, which earlier looked like an open and shut case of a simple murder. In a case where there are lot of emotions and personal prejudice are rampant throughout heated arguments, the cognitive dissonance takes place indiscernibly and the men finally arrive at a verdict.

One of the Jurors says, " We are talking about somebody's life here. We can't decide in five minutes." As a defendant he purports the cognitive dissonance and argues the case against his own preconceived ideas.

Lastly we can look at the concept of modern Racism, which is the racial, gender bias that segregates or rather attempts to segregate one person from another. Discriminations on the basis of colour and class are main biases that define racism. Modern Racism is basically a glass ceiling that reinstates that a certain section of society on the basis of their gender or color is being categorized negatively.

In the film there are veiled references made by the jurors about the section of the society to which the defendant belonged. The fact that the defendant was a poor Puerto Rican from a poor background had raised many biased comments and references such as:

" These people". At one instance a juror says, " You know how these people lie. It's born in them. They don't know what the truth is. And let me tell you, they don't need any big reason to kill someone either..." But as he says this, all the other jurors begin to get up and walk away. They protest vehemently

against the fellow juror's racist comment. This also becomes the most powerful scene in the film, as cognitive dissonance also comes into play here along with the theory Modern Racism. Even those who were presumably thinking that the defendant is guilty did not support the prejudiced comments of the juror. Although the angry exchanges between some of the jurors seem to be exaggerated, the film manages to grip the audience with its underlying tensions and psychological aspersions.

Works Cited Page

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