

**Hear it From the Judge**

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## **Contemporary Lawyer Movies**

Last month in this column I reviewed four classical lawyer movies. Of course, there are many more classical movies involving lawyers. In this article I will review four lawyer movies which are of a more contemporary vintage though some may also become lawyer classics.

***The Firm (1993).***

No lawyer movie review is complete absent a John Grisham movie. Mitch McDeere (Tom Cruise) is a young lawyer, fresh from law school, who joins a prestigious Tennessee law firm. McDeere quickly learns things are not as promised and strange things are happening to members of the firm and their families. Eddie Lomax (Gary Busey) is a seedy lawyer in the firm and Wayne Tarrance (Ed Harris) plays the FBI agent who is attempting to convince Mitch McDeere to help him investigate the firm. Though this movie does not contain courtroom drama, the drama does heat up substantially as McDeere attempts to uncover the sinister conduct occurring in the firm.

***My Cousin Vinny (1992).***

Perhaps more so than any other lawyer movie of any age, this movie combines humor with excellent courtroom drama. Vincent Gambini (Joe Pesci) is a rookie New York lawyer who comes to the south for his first case which is to represent his cousin's friend. His cousin is William Gambini (Ralph Macchio) whose friend is Stan Rothenstein (Mitchell Whitfield). The humor continues with the relationship of Vinny's fiancée Mona Lisa Vito (Marisa Tomei) who is also from New York and who has a foul mouth. It is Vito's expertise with cars which leads to Vinny's success in the trial. Finally, Fred Gwynn (Hermun Munster) gives a wonderful performance as Judge Chamberlin Haller.

***Erin Brockovich (2000).***

Though the star of this movie, Erin Brockovich (Julia Roberts) is a legal assistant rather than a lawyer, it is a very entertaining movie based upon a law suit filed against a California power

company. Brockovich is an unemployed single mother who is desperate to find work. She successfully convinces her personal lawyer – Ed Masry (Albert Finney) in her losing lawsuit involving an automobile accident to hire her. Brockovich is not taken seriously until her investigation begins to unfold a suspicious real estate scheme in which the California power company is buying up real estate which has been contaminated by the illegal dumping of toxic waste.

***Philadelphia (1993).***

Andrew Beckett (Tom Hanks) is a lawyer with AIDS who is fired by his law firm due to his medical condition. Beckett hires a homophobic lawyer – Joe Miller (Denzel Washington) who is the only lawyer he is able to find to represent him in a wrongful dismissal lawsuit. During the courtroom battle, Miller begins to shed his distaste for Beckett’s condition and begins to see him as no different from anyone else. At this point, Miller leads Beckett to success in his lawsuit. Tom Hanks won an Academy Award for his performance.

Enjoy the movies and Happy Holidays.