

Twelve Corrupt Jurors

By Bruce Bawer

In 1954, Reginald Rose's play *12 Angry Men* was broadcast on national TV; three years later a feature film version, directed by Sidney Lumet and starring Henry Fonda, was released in cinemas.



Former President Donald Trump after his conviction on May 30, 2024 (CNBC Television / YouTube)

12 Angry Men tells the story of a Manhattan jury – all male, as the title suggests, because at the time that the teleplay was aired, women weren't permitted to serve on juries in that jurisdiction (the change came, coincidentally, in the year that the film came out) – who, over the course of the drama, deliberate a murder case.

At the beginning of the story, all but one of the jurors cast votes to find the defendant guilty; by the end, the single holdout – the character played in the movie by Fonda – has used common sense and simple reasoning to turn his fellow jurors around, one by one, so that they end up delivering a verdict of not guilty.

It was a story that made the American system of justice, in which ordinary citizens come together to decide the fate of a fellow American, look – at its best – like a noble and beautiful thing. The play, and the movie, acknowledge

implicitly that no individual is perfect, but that if a group of responsible, mature citizens come together to evaluate evidence and make a decision about the fate of a fellow human being, their interaction in the jury room can result in an act of justice.

I imagine that in the 1950s, *12 Angry Men* appealed to a certain kind of liberal who believed in the promise of the American system of justice and for whom the sort of characters played by Henry Fonda – who was famously liberal – in one movie after another were the very embodiment of the American spirit at its best.

Now twelve men and women who spent weeks listening to sheer nonsense in a Manhattan courtroom run by a staggeringly dishonest judge have emerged from a jury room with a verdict that will go down in history as one of the most appalling betrayals of American justice ever. In recent years, Americans have become acquainted with the concept of lawfare – the use of the justice system to punish one's ideological opponents. No single individual has been more brutally targeted by practitioners of lawfare than former President Donald Trump.

During the 2016 presidential campaign, the tirelessness with which Trump, who was already no spring chicken, knocked out one Republican opponent after another, and then bested Hillary Clinton, was beyond impressive. During his years in the White House, his ability to withstand the efforts by Clinton, Obama, a massive cast of inside-the-Beltway swamp creatures, and countless members of the legacy media to paint him as a Russian puppet and to take him down made one's respect for his fortitude go through the roof.

Robbed of a reelection, he was demonized for saying about the election steal of 2020 things that Hillary had been cheered repeatedly for saying about the fair election of 2016. Accused of fomenting an insurrection that wasn't anything like an insurrection, he survived. He endured two impeachments and

endless court cases, all of them founded on sheer nonsense. But not until Thursday did a Manhattan jury, including two lawyers, find him guilty of 34 felony counts that were like something out of the Stalinist era. Twelve jurors, and there wasn't one Henry Fonda in the bunch. Not even close.

I was born in Manhattan. I loved growing up in New York. It made me who I am. But I'm delighted that I don't live there anymore. Who are these appalling people (including, again, two lawyers) who are so full of hostility toward Donald Trump – a fellow New Yorker and a man who (for heaven's sake) did so much to help the city rise from the ashes after the disastrous mayoralities of men like Abe Beame and David Dinkins – that they're willing to ignore fundamental notions of right and wrong, of justice and injustice, in order to convict an innocent man of a long list of so-called felonies?

Watching the coverage of the Trump verdict, I thought not just of *12 Angry Men* but of another old movie: *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962), directed by Robert Mulligan and based on the novel by Harper Lee. Set in the 1930s, it tells the story of Atticus Finch, a white lawyer in small-town Alabama who is assigned to defend a black man, Tom Robinson, accused of raping a white woman. It soon becomes clear that Robinson is innocent, and that the all-white jury knows it. Nonetheless, the jury delivers a guilty verdict – because it cares less about the facts of the case than, as Atticus puts it, about the “code” of their society.

In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the “code” is about race. In the Trump case, the “code” is about Democratic Party orthodoxy. About being woke. If any of the jurors in *To Kill a Mockingbird* had dared to vote to acquit Tom Robinson, he would have been given holy hell after returning to his home and neighborhood and workplace. The same goes for the Trump jurors – perhaps especially the two lawyers, who some observers actually believed would vote to deliver justice. Instead, they decided to deliver votes that would make it possible for them

to return to their law firms without being savaged by their colleagues.

For the first time, a former president of the United States has been convicted of a felony. Never has a verdict been more political and more unjust. If this ugly situation has a silver lining, it is this: that it has made American patriots even more aware than ever of just how far the American justice system has fallen and that it will make Trump supporters even more aware of just how vital it is to return him to the White House.

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