

# Film Streams Repertory Series: Henry Fonda

## **12 Angry Men** 1957

Friday, May 1 - Thursday, May 14, 2009



### **Film Information**

**Directed by**  
Sidney Lumet

**Language**  
English

**Running Time**  
96 minutes

### **Film Notes**

Henry Fonda appeared in dozens of films in his long and storied cinematic career, but there's only one in which he carried the title of producer. Bringing 12 ANGRY MEN to the big screen—and then watching it flop at the box office—proved so miserable of an experience that Fonda swore he'd never do it again. That the film went on to earn three Academy Award nominations (including one for Best Picture) and continued to gain in popularity as the years went by mattered not: Fonda wouldn't produce again. But the legacy of that one effort—to say nothing of his performance—is remarkable.

Written by Reginald Rose (Fonda's co-producer), 12 ANGRY MEN was initially conceived for the stage and later aired as a teleplay on CBS in 1954. Together, Rose and Fonda raised \$350,000 for a film adaptation and hired a director, Sidney Lumet, whose credits to that point were solely in television. The decision to entrust a newcomer with their film proved prescient: Lumet earned the first of his four Oscar nominations for Best Director—the others coming for DOG DAY AFTERNOON (1975), NETWORK (1976), and THE VERDICT (1982). With 12 ANGRY MEN, Fonda didn't

simply make a classic; he helped launch a dynamic directorial career.

In an era of booming budgets, bright colors, and exotic locations, 12 ANGRY MEN was made on a relatively low budget, shot in black and white, and set almost exclusively in a single room—all of which posed unique challenges to Lumet. While the performances stand out, the director made the most of them with camera tricks and techniques to convey a sense of claustrophobia. Notice how the camera angles begin to change as the film progresses—from above eye-level, to eye-level, and then below eye-level—as well as how the camera captures the performers and their surroundings. Lumet increased the length of the lens as shooting went on, making it seem as though the room was closing in around the characters.

—Casey



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“We nine can’t understand how you three are still so sure. Maybe you can tell us.”

**More Information**

**Screenplay by**  
Reginald Rose

**Featuring**  
Henry Fonda  
Martin Balsam  
John Fiedler  
Lee J. Cobb  
E.G. Marshall  
Jack Klugman  
Ed Binns  
Jack Warden  
Joseph Sweeney  
Ed Begley  
George Voskovec  
Robert Webber

**Cinematography by**  
Boris Kaufman

**Original Music by**  
Kenyon Hopkins

**Film Editing by**  
Carl Lerner

**Country of Origin**  
USA

“Technically, it’s an enormously complicated movie. You’d think that shooting in a tight space would be the easiest thing in the world, when in fact the easiest thing to shoot is a cattle round-up! Just put six cameras on it and all the footage will be so marvelous you won’t know what to choose because the action is so terrific. Here, through the slow intensification of performance, and then also through a very subtle use of the camera: use of lenses, use of lighting... not trying to avoid the claustrophobia, but trying to take advantage of it. Make it more claustrophobic. Make the ceiling feel lower, make it seem as if the walls are closing in on them. We weren’t kidding anybody. We were going to be in one room. Let’s use it dramatically!”

—**Sidney Lumet**

**Also Recommended**

Anatomy of a Murder 1959 (Dir. Otto Preminger)  
To Kill a Mockingbird 1962 (Dir. Robert Mulligan)

**Also Recommended (By Sidney Lumet)**

Serpico 1973  
Dog Day Afternoon 1975  
Network 1976  
The Verdict 1982  
Running on Empty 1988