



Framing Female Lawyers: Women on Trial in Film

Cynthia Lucia

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As real women increasingly entered the professions from the 1970s onward, their cinematic counterparts followed suit. Women lawyers, in particular, were the protagonists of many Hollywood films of the Reagan-Bush era, serving as a kind of shorthand reference any time a script needed a powerful career woman. Yet a close viewing of these films reveals contradictions and anxieties that belie the films' apparent acceptance of women's professional roles. In film after film, the woman lawyer herself effectively ends up "on trial" for violating norms of femininity and patriarchal authority.

In this book, Cynthia Lucia offers a sustained analysis of women lawyer films as a genre and as a site where other genres including film noir, maternal melodrama, thrillers, action romance, and romantic comedy intersect. She traces Hollywood representations of female lawyers through close readings of films from the 1949 *Adam's Rib* through films of the 1980s and 1990s, including *Jagged Edge*, *The Accused*, and *The Client*, among others. She also examines several key male lawyer films and two independent films, Lizzie Borden's *Love Crimes* and Susan Streitfeld's *Female Perversions*. Lucia convincingly demonstrates that making movies about women lawyers and the law provides unusually fertile ground for exploring patriarchy in crisis. This, she argues, is the cultural stimulus that prompts filmmakers to create stories about powerful women that simultaneously question and undermine women's right to wield authority.

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