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Introduction to Papers from UCLA's Law and Popular Culture Seminar

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The three papers that follow were written for the seminar on Law and Popular Culture taught by Paul Bergman and myself for the fourth time during the Spring 2001 semester at UCLA School of Law. This seminar is situated within the rapidly expanding scholarly field of law and popular culture. That movement treats works of popular culture about law and lawyers (such as films, novels, or television shows) as legal texts, as important in their own way as statutes or judicial precedents.

The students in the seminar share our conviction that the public learns most of what it thinks it knows about law, lawyers and the legal system from works of popular legal culture. They believe that information or misinformation gleaned from popular culture has a significant impact on "law" in the legal realist sense—meaning what judges, jurors, attorneys, legislators, voters, and ordinary consumers or producers actually do in their contracting, fact-finding, law-applying, and law-making functions. They are convinced that popular culture mirrors, often in an exaggerated and caricatured form, actual popular attitudes and beliefs about the institutions and characters that it describes.

We believe that law students (and lawyers as well) can benefit from studying the ways they are portrayed in popular culture, since the issues addressed in popular culture media are often serious ones for the profession. Thus the seminar identifies particular broad issues, such as legal education, women in law, the life of the lawyer, or the criminal justice system. Students watch a film or television show outside of class, then analyze that film (and the subject area with which it deals) in depth during class sessions. The methodology pursued during class

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meetings is then employed in seminar papers, a representative and diverse group of which the *Entertainment Law Review* reprints here.

I hope that the readers of these papers will come away with a sense of the value of taking popular culture seriously. It is not just trash to be consumed and instantly forgotten. Popular culture has much to teach us about the world in which we live and about the beliefs of ordinary people concerning law, lawyers, and the legal system. It reminds us that those beliefs are indeed constructed, in large part by the fictitious stories that people consume on film or television. Sometimes, the works of popular culture even teach us about what lawyers do and what is wrong with the law and legal institutions. So read these articles—then go out and rent an old movie about law and lawyers; enjoy it, of course, but think hard about what messages the filmmaker has sent to you and how you received them.