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This movie has been designated a Critic's Pick by the film reviewers of The Times.

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## **Screen: '12 Angry Men'; Jury Room Drama Has Debut at Capitol**

**By A.H. WEILER**

ALTHOUGH cameras have been focused on jurors before, it is difficult to recall a more incisively revealing record of the stuff of which such "peers" can be made than is presented in "12 Angry Men."

For Reginald Rose's excellent film elaboration of his fine television play of 1954, which arrived at the Capitol Saturday, is a penetrating, sensitive and sometimes shocking dissection of the hearts and minds of men who obviously are something less than gods. It makes for taut, absorbing and compelling drama that reaches far beyond the close confines of its jury room setting.

Credit the power of this lucid study to the fact that the attributes, failings, passions and prejudices of these talesmen is as striking and important as the awesome truth that they hold a boy's life in their hands. Director Sidney Lumet, who is making his debut in the movie medium with "12 Angry Men," and Boris Kaufman, an Academy Award-winning camera man, made expert use of a superb cast, which is ingeniously photographed in what normally would have been static situations. Above all, they have made full use of the trenchant words and ideas of the author to plumb the characters of their principals.

Mr. Rose's basic thought is that the somewhat terrifying legal ukase, "beyond a reasonable doubt," should not be regarded as just a flat phrase casually coined by the law-makers. The defendant involved (whom we see only momentarily as the film opens), is a tough 18-year-old from a broken slum home charged with having stabbed his brutal father, an erstwhile convict. All but one of the veniremen are convinced this is an open-and-shut case. This juror does not assert that the boy is innocent but the conduct of the trial, especially that of the defense lawyer, has left him with gnawing doubts.

It is here that Mr. Rose begins delicately to expose the dissenter and his opponents. There is the self-made man who angrily remembers his son's defiance of authority. There is the garage owner seething with racial prejudice. There is the calm stockbroker who seriously has arrived at his verdict of guilty. There is the wise-cracking salesman anxious to vote so as to be able to get out to the ball game. There is the handsome, vacillating Madison Avenue advertising man. There is an old man, wise and benign with the years. And there is a refugee watchmaker who is appreciative of the ideals and freedoms of democracy.

Henry Fonda gives his most forceful portrayal in years as the open-minded juror whose logical reasoning implants facts and doubts into the minds of his colleagues so that they finally change their vote to not guilty. In being strikingly emotional he is both natural and effective. Strangely enough, the illogical aspect of the plot is embodied in his exclusive discoveries of evidence and improbabilities in the trial itself. Some of the other jurors appear capable of such perception too.

A viewer may assume, however that Mr. Rose was interested solely in establishing the characters of his cast, which he has done admirably. Each of his performers has a "fat" part and they are convincingly played.

Lee J. Cobb, for example, is excellent as the vengeful self-made man tortured by the memory of a son who broke away from his rule. Ed Begley is properly warped and rabid as the prejudiced garage owner. And, to single out a few others, E. G. Marshall is fine as the unperturbed broker, as are Jack Warden, as the flip sport; George Voskovec, as the watchmaker; Joseph Sweeney, as the observant old man and Robert Webber, as the vacuous advertising type.

Messrs, Rose, Lumet, Fonda, et al. have kept the fair sex out of their jury room. Although it may sound ungallant, these "12 Angry Men," are all right without distaff glamour. Their dramas are powerful and provocative enough to keep a viewer spellbound.

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