

REVERSE ENGINEERING THE CRYSTAL BALL:
WHAT MEDIA PORTRAYALS SAY ABOUT PREPAIRING FOR A CAREER IN
LAW

HONORS THESIS

Presented to the Honors Committee of
Texas State University-San Marcos
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements

For Graduation in the University Honors Program

By

Ashleah Howard

San Marcos, Texas
May 2011

I. Introduction

For most of my life I have been fortunate enough to have a strong conviction of the career I wanted to pursue. It seemed from my first word on everyone knew I should be an attorney. My first word came about, as I've been told, when my father was playing with me and I started to coo, as babies do. My father jokingly rebutted, "Speak English!" And as instructed I quickly chattered back, "English!" Oftentimes in grade school I was told I could have been Oprah's daughter due to my unique articulation and lack of a Texas drawl, even though I was raised by two rural native Texans. My mother even jokingly suggested to me that I write a letter to Oprah's producers stating that people often take me for her lost love child.

Nevertheless, as I grew older, it was always suggested to me that I should be a lawyer when I grow up, and make my parents lots of money. Eventually I became perplexed by the comments and wondered to myself: what is so great about being an attorney; what exactly do they do? Long discussions with my mother about the topic piqued my interest. In my eager and youthful mind, attorneys were the purveyors of truth who shine special light on things that go unseen by the naked eye to illuminate the full portrait of justice. I imagined that through their powerful litigation skills and mature voices they were real life superheroes, in pinstripes instead of spandex; that is what I wanted to be. I was convinced that being an attorney was the career of a lifetime.

As I grew older that childhood filter—the one that strains out imperfections and glamorizes impossible feats—started to fade, and I started to re-evaluate the dream I had so long ago, trying to include more realities and the limitations by technicalities. I began

to ask different questions: Is that all attorneys do? How much do they get paid? How long is the schooling? What type of undergraduate degree do I need? How much does the schooling cost? I'm estimated to be in how much debt? The journey from childhood into pre-adulthood changed the way I looked at my career choice. Sure, I want to love what I do and make a lot of money doing it, but there is more to a job than signing up for a career on career day at school. There is a certain amount of mental preparation that must supplement the material learned as an undergraduate education before someone can say with a true conviction that their career choice is worth the additional schooling and is suitable to their lifestyle.

Now, as an adult, many of my basic questions about the legal field and the necessary education have been answered. I know that I love to study the law and I am primarily interested in litigation, most likely in the fields of either criminal law or family law. Still, having taken the entry test, sent off my applications, and sat waiting for my acceptance letters to arrive, I still feel uneasy about what to expect in the training process. My last most intrinsic questions have yet to be answered: how might my ethics change (for better or worse)? What degree of hell are we talking about in the first year of law school? Should I be scared? Should I trust my peers? Once I'm a lawyer will I still be capable of humility? Can I maintain my clients as my first priority and the number of billable hours later? Will I have time for family and my own personal space?

In this thesis I will try to reverse engineer hindsight and learn what to expect as I start a last, yet new and unfamiliar leg of my academic marathon. In efforts to prepare myself for the unique experience of law school and the legal work force, I study some of the most infamous and highly regarded works of literature and film. And concluding my

research, I examine some of the classic jokes about lawyers and law school that have survived generations to tell a story about what our society finds unique about this particular class of people. I research these books, films and jokes and deduce what they say implicitly and explicitly about what I should expect from law school and the career field when it is all said and done.

Although taking a close look at popular media and its relationship to a career in law can help give me focus on what to expect from my own future, these materials offer only a broad consensus of a general trend. The most important thing for me in this process is to use the conclusions I draw from my research to guide and manipulate the indeterminate qualities of my own journey in building a career in law. My thoughts going into this research are that law school will be a journey that I will hate and cherish simultaneously due to the curriculum and the new experiences I encounter, but ultimately the journey is what I make it out to be; it will not make me. However, I fear that law school and the legal realm might shape me into something I never intended to be and change my life in such a way that I may not be able to accept ethically. I don't want to become the negative stereotype. I want to be a great attorney who is admired for her work ethic and morals. Can I learn anything from what popular culture has to say? It may shape ideas and attitudes but it does not directly influence reality.

II. Findings

A. Books

It seems that the written word is the first step of influence in popular media. If there were no written pieces such as books, novels short stories, etc., many of our most

popular scripts would not have existed and therefore many movies and television shows would have not been filmed and plays would have not been produced. Popular literature has influenced generations of the global population since its creation. The ideas of the written word seep their way into our thoughts and perceptions everyday with or without populations being intelligible of the phenomena's existence. When thinking of the common perceptions of lawyers and law school within the American culture there are many popular works of literature to reference. For the reason that perceptions and judgments made about a particular group of people is a dynamic variable throughout time, I have chosen to confine the focus of my research to the perceptions of lawyers and law students in American literature to the mid-twentieth century through the present. While some technical aspects of the legal system and the way its processes are taught have changed (and will continue to change) since 1960, the characterizations popular media chooses to illuminate most often have remained rather static. This is why I wonder: how much truth do those static perceptions hold given their forever dynamic real life counterparts? Are the characterizations static? I want to believe, but then I want proof.

The Paper Chase

I found three pieces that provide a great amount of coverage on law students and the environment of law school. The first is the 1970 work by John Jay Osborn, Jr., titled *The Paper Chase*. The novel is a fictional account of a student attending Harvard Law School and his battle with his overbearing professor, Dr. Charles Kingsfield. Through its popularity, *The Paper Chase* was made in to an equally popular movie and television

series. The author, a descendent of America's first United States Supreme Court Chief Justice John Jay (which provides a certain insight into not only the weight of his prestigious legal background but also his familial interest in the American legal system), was himself a Harvard graduate, though he chose to pursue his legal education at Yale Law School.

Osborne's story centers on an ambitious young Harvard Law student, Hart, who becomes obsessed with his Contract Law professor, Dr. Kingsfield. Through his interest in the professor and his assignment of a contract law outline by his study group, Hart becomes an expert on Kingsfield's subject and all of his unassigned original works and papers. Hart's obsession becomes so strong that he even goes as far as to break into the Harvard Law School Library just to read the original notes Kingfield took as a student. Hart's careful attention to his professor's work along with his relentless work ethic leads Dr. Kingsfield to ask him to contribute to the professor's paper. Simultaneously, Hart enters into a romantic relationship with a young woman named Susan Field, who turns out to be Dr. Kingsfield's daughter. Susan's distinctly independent personality only proves to complicate Hart's efforts to put his best foot forward as an aspiring attorney. While Hart runs ragged in the rat-race experience as a Harvard Law student, Susan could not be more uninterested in Hart's stressors or anything he finds important within his law school microcosm. By the end of the term Hart has made what he feels is a tremendous effort to connect with his beloved professor, but when he realizes that Dr. Kingsfield relates to his students as nothing more than names on paper that come and go with ease, he directs a few choice words at his once-favorite professor and storms out of the lecture hall. After much preparation for the final exam, Hart receives his grade but refuses to

look at it. Instead, he folds the exam into a paper airplane and sends it sailing into the Atlantic Ocean.

The most important factor to this novel is not Hart himself, although there are many things to be learned from his observations and independent experiences. The key lies in Hart's relationship and obsession with Dr. Kingsfield, in particular how Hart idealizes him and the influence Hart's professor has on his aspirations in the law profession. Kingsfield is a commanding professor who is as highly respected as he is feared. He is also noted for his relentless work ethic, working from early morning hours long into the night in efforts to build upon his already vast knowledge in contract law so that he may be a more intelligent instructor. There are many moments in which Dr. Kingsfield is cold and rather distant, briefly highlighted with moments that reveal more personable qualities. In the most distinct incident of Kingsfield's harshness, he calls Hart to the front of the lecture hall and presents him with a dime, telling him to call his mother and tell her there is little chance of ever becoming a lawyer. Hart, quite taken with Kingsfield's knowledge and work ethic that never seems to falter, thought that his professor's work and relentless devotion to his career was out of appreciation for his students to better their budding careers, but after Kingsfield embarrassed him in front of all of his peers and disrespected his efforts, Hart understood that the idealistic portrait he painted of his mentor was inaccurate. The ravenous work ethic and the thirty years experience of students coming and going, passing and failing had jaded Kingsfield. His long hours sheltered him, and his knowledge in the face of ignorance created elitist tendencies. Hart—young, eager and impressionable—learns through his journey that effort and personality mean little to nothing. As another law student told him in the

beginning of the novel, the success in the career field is determined by your grades or what you look like; so those students who wish to succeed in their career must work hard to make competitive grades and buy the suit and vest to look the part. Hart and his other peers are disappointed when they learn that for all intents and purposes their life must change entirely from what they are accustomed to, inside and out. In the end, Kingsfield's cold and distant disposition was irrelevant; what mattered was that he was competent and his students were presented with the information they needed to pursue their future law careers. His demeanor was just a complication that had to be overlooked in order to value the learning experience. Kingsfield worked hard and looked the part.

One L

The second book I chose to evaluate in my research tells a similar story; still, it holds its own relevance and sheds a unique light on the first year of law school. This book is the infamous *One L* by Scott Turow. More of a non-fictional approach to the exploration of law school, *One L* is the sequential account of Turow's first year at Harvard Law School.

Turow starts his experience with a heavy cloud of anxiety, as many new students do. He starts his first term studying Civil Procedure, Contracts, and Torts among others. After the initial anxiety, once he gets settled, he is overcome with excitement and dives head first into the stimulating curriculum. He admires his professors for both their brilliant minds and their cruel enforcement of the work load, particularly his Contract professor Dr. Perini. Later in the term the author starts to abandon his initial excitement and feel hesitant or uneasy about his place at the law school, complicated by his exams

and the toll it takes on his marriage. Turow is frequently absent from his household due to his long hours of studying while his wife attempts to maintain her own career. Still, he cannot afford to abandon his studies even though it pains him to see his wife stressed, neglected, and lonely. Though Turow is the only spouse, in the relationship, pursuing graduate school, his wife is quickly taken in its tight hold as there seems to be nothing outside Harvard Law School that exists, not even their marriage.

Caught up in the tongue lashings from the professors to make the grades and have the competitive edge, while preparing for finals at the end of his first term the author decides to block a student from membership in his study group. Turow reasoned that the student had not adequately contributed sufficient notes to the group throughout the term and would not have time to make up the slack before the first exam. However, he realizes that he has become subject to the beastly competitive nature that many students fall victim to in order to achieve an advantage over their fellow students. Embarrassed by his behavior and the effects law school has had on his personality and ethics, he pledges indifference in the final months of the year.

The end of the book starts to reflect his inability to emotionally invest in anything, especially in the systematic web of law school that has turned him into what he considered to be selfish and destructive. With this grim outlook, he admits that he made decent grades and worked hard for them, but in the process his experiences in law school had changed him for the worst.

The author's journey sheds light on some of the horrors that for many law students only exist as rumors. To hear firsthand some of the stressors, affirmations, and changes that one goes through just in their first year of law school lends a great weight to

Turow's word. To say the least, this book is quite discouraging to those hoping to pursue a career in law; many students pursuing law school have spent most of their lives thinking that law school was just another three years of training, not exponentially different than what they were use to in their undergraduate program. But Turow makes it clear that law school is a unique experience with its own set of hurdles, not only resulting from the curriculum, which is a heavy load in itself, but also the attitude among the student body. Most people are not accustomed to thinking of their academic prowess in relation to others' performance—usually the person studying and taking the exam wields the power in the grade he make and the success in the program. However, Turow informs his audience that you not only have to study and master the material, but also watch your back for students who will mistreat and deceive you in hopes of gaining a competitive edge. The author shows his readers not only that your closest peers may be your enemies , but that destructive behavior may overcome you and cause you abandon your own moral compass. The question remains: is there a silver lining in this cloud? And is it possible not to fall victim to the barbaric behavior that can take place within the law school student body?

Storming the Court: How a Band of Law Students Fought the President—and Won

One L was a great representation of the horrors and stressors that might deter one from law school, but it serves as a great introduction to the third and final book in my research, *Storming the Court: How a Band of Law Students Fought the President—and Won* by Brandt Goldstein. Goldstein's book is a spellbinding true story of how a group of law students challenged the federal government in a fight for human liberties and

freedom that traveled all the way to the United States Supreme Court. I saved this book for last because it tells a tale that aspiring attorneys want to hear and gives them a reason to pursue law school even though the curriculum is tough and the student body can be overwhelmingly competitive and sometimes malicious.

The students in Goldstein's non-fiction work are the idealistic version of Turow's piece. Showing ethical gumption and the ability to stand together instead of stepping on each other to shine alone, these students demonstrate some basic human unity. The fact that Goldstein's work is a true story just enhances the hopes of any law student who reads it.

As the story goes, in 1992, three hundred Haitians, all of whom had qualified for political asylum in America, were forced into Guantanamo Bay—an American detention camp located on a naval base in Cuba—because they had tested positive for HIV. Told that they may never be freed, *Storming the Court* follows these men, women, and children, including a young enigmatic activist by the name of Yvonne Pascal, who had no contact with the outside world and no access to any kind of advocacy. After two presidential administrations determined that these families had no rights under U.S. law, they had little help.

However, a gang of students attending Yale Law School, in a great display of human compassion in the face of a system that pulls for self-interest, chose to advocate for these suffering refugees. The group of young aspiring lawyers (most of whom were only in their twenties), led by a gifted law professor, Harold Koh, waged a legal battle against the president of the United States to defend the constitutional rights of these helpless prisoners. It was no doubt the legal lesson of a lifetime; a field trip any law

student would love to take. Still, in order to be the advocates for these refugee families, these students and professor had to put their classes and career plans on the back burner to fight a slew of fierce U.S. attorneys, some of the best legal minds in the country, in a capricious case that eventually led the White House to step in. The case was indeed a “Starr” studded event, featuring the now-president of Baylor University in Waco, Texas, Kenneth Starr among the top Justice Department officials; U.S. Marines; and deep-seated human rights attorneys, not to mention the belles of the ball, Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton.

The thrilling book follows these dedicated law students in their exhausting journey from the classroom into the highest court in the land. Still, the hard work and many law students’ lives put on hold, in order to take their trip, seemed to be well worth it when the ruling came back a total victory. A federal court in New York ordered the government to free all the refugees immediately, based on the finding that the U.S. Constitution’s due process clause applied to the naval base, Guantanamo Bay.

This non-fiction piece is important for many reasons. It proves not only that there is such a thing as humanity in law school, but that lawyers themselves can be compassionate and that the current generation of law students have the know-how and the capability to advocate and persuade the highest courts in America. This is no doubt an inspirational story for those thinking of going to law school. While Turow’s *One L* shows the negatives, Goldstein highlights the changes for the better that can be made by pursuing a degree in law. *Storming the Court* shows why people need lawyers and why students want to be lawyers in the first place. The job is not easy and the road is not short, but the payoff can be exponentially great.

B. Film

The art of cinema plays on the five senses and through light, music, verbal cues, and body language enhances the written word in a way that captivates and entertains throngs of people that texts never did. Film goes layers deeper by adding elements that in text were left up for interpretation. It is an age old saying “a picture is worth a thousand words,” and cinema is a rapid projection of thousands of still images that captures the evolution of the process. People do not make a habit of making assessments of people by what they say but more about their general appearance, what they do and how they do it. The human brain becomes many times more active to moving pictures and color than to two-dimensional text. Whether it’s reacting positively or negatively, it’s working harder, making more deductions and associations. In turn, cinema is very important in assessing how popular media sees lawyers and law students in the flesh, without flowery wording and absent details but the way they walk, talk, and how they appear to the audience.

In my research I came across many films that implemented farfetched plots and added unnecessary drama that had little valuable insight to the law profession or law school. However, the five films that I have chosen are in fact classics, some of which have been honored for decades as some of the best legal motion pictures made. These films are not solely esteemed for their star studded cast, but also for their content, and that is what is relevant to this work: the message about the characters that is being portrayed to the audience (intentional or otherwise).

To Kill a Mockingbird

The 1962 motion picture *To Kill a Mockingbird* is both a classic award-winning book and motion picture. Generations of students and moviegoers alike hail this piece as a guiding light of moral standards. The movie takes place in the small town of Maycomb, Alabama, and spans the course of a year and a half. Atticus Finch (Gregory Peck) is a highly regarded attorney in the small southern town. A widower, he is the sole caretaker for his two children: ten-year-old son Jem (Phillip Alford), and six-year-old daughter, Scout (Mary Badham). For the most part Jem and Scout are the typical curious neighborhood children spending much of their time in the school house and wondering the neighborhood. They have an ongoing fascination with the Radley house a few houses down the street and a mysterious man named Boo Radley who is said to live there. Boo is described to the children as a dangerous maniac who is chained to his bed by his father for fear he may take a human life.

Atticus is chosen by the county judge to represent Tom Robinson (Brock Peters), a local black man wrongfully accused of raping a local white woman. Atticus is determined to represent Robinson to the best of his ability and show no bias to color or creed, even to the dismay and threats of the local townsmen, especially Bob Ewell (James Anderson), the father of the alleged victim. Atticus presents a stirring case to the jury, but the all-white jury nevertheless finds Tom guilty due to their unwillingness to take the word of a black man as truth.

The whole story is told through the eyes of Atticus' daughter, Scout. Robinson's trial parallels with the children's (and the rest of Maycomb's) misjudgment of Boo Radley as a strange and dangerous character, even though they themselves have never

even seen him, let alone had a conversation with him. Boo proves to be more of a saint than a monster, when he saves Jem and Scout from being brutally attacked by Bob Ewell— purportedly a reaction to their father's representing a black man, though it is revealed that he was in fact the real perpetrator.

Both Tom Robinson and Boo Radley were innocent men oppressed by those around them for reasons out of their control. Midway through the film, Atticus makes a pivotal speech in the film, proclaiming that it is a sin to kill a mockingbird because they are innocent creatures who only provide the world with beautiful song. Both Robinson and Radley are symbolic mockingbirds who have committed no crime or destructive act, only doing good things for their neighbors. Tom Robinson works hard, toiling for his family and keeping his head down, trying to avoid trouble from his oppressors. And Boo keeps to himself, in his own house constantly being bothered and his privacy infringed upon by those around him, and he still saves two young lives despite what people say about him. Still, Tom is executed, his would-be murderer Bob Ewell paying the price when Boo kills him trying to save Atticus' children. Boo is spared the additional public attention and scrutiny that would have come if Atticus and the other legal officials of Maycomb decided to tell the truth and spread word of Boo's brave actions, but all he really wants is to be left in peace. Going public would have metaphorically killed the mockingbird and further held Boo Radley under Maycomb's thumb.

The black and white cinematography is reminiscent of the oppression and depression-era of the Deep South. Although the film was not shot on location, there was careful attention to detail down to the accents and the bushy trails, dirt roads and Scout's tattered overalls. The audience feels the setting, and the delicate details enhance the

believability of the storyline. The narration provided by Scout's adult character establishes a timeline throughout the film and adds the notion of hindsight that a child wouldn't normally possess. The cinematography also plays on the assumptions and implicit associations of stereotypes and rumors presented in the dialogue of the film. Boo Radley remains mysterious through the use of shadows and delicate creaks of wood and wisps of wind. No words had to be said to play on the fear that was never substantiated other than secondhand information at best. In the case of Atticus, he is never seen without his prim and proper suit, even as he tucks his children into bed. His character is always fully illuminated and filmed from an angle slightly lower than the rest of the characters so that he may look taller and more statuesque to present his high standards and his starched ethics.

The two most vital characters in this film when examining the perception of lawyers are Scout and Atticus. It's important to know that Scout is the protagonist and her character keeps the pace of the film. Scout is abnormally intelligent for her age, although she displays some immaturity and misplaced anger because she does not understand the injustice and bias of the world around her; for this reason, she gets in fights in school and causes trouble with other children. Scout is an immature compared to her father. Though she has a combative streak, she maintains the basic faith and goodness and wants to advocate the strong ethics and morals that her father maintains. Scout's parallel to Atticus is perhaps why she is represented as a rather masculine character who only wears a dress when she is forced to; this illuminates her stereotypically masculine stubborn streak for the good of her community and humans alike. It is Scout's innocence

and ability to be unbiased and her strong connection and love for her father that explains her presence as the narrator instead of Atticus or his oldest son Jem.

Atticus Finch is a distinct character not only for his moral compass as a lawyer in such a biased community, but also by his dry sense of humor that seems to highlight his sharp legal mind. He is also highlighted as one of the only residents of Maycomb who supports racial equality, and his sense of morality and justice is instilled in his children and proudly worn as an example for the rest of his community. When Atticus agrees to defend Tom Robinson, he does so knowing that the county judge is simply going through the motions of due process; the people of Maycomb do not expect Atticus to defend Tom to the best of his ability, but only out of obligation to his profession. Still, Atticus puts his heart into the case and is confident in Tom's innocence. Atticus serves as a symbol for Maycomb's backbone and the ideal vision of a legal advocate.

Inherit the Wind

The second movie evaluated in my research is the 1960 film *Inherit the Wind*. The story is a captivating courtroom drama loosely based on the Scopes Monkey trial of 1925, set during a sweltering summer in the small southern town of Hillsboro. Two famous attorneys, Mathew Harrison Brady (prosecutor, played by Fredrick March) and Henry Drummond (representation for the defendant, played by Spencer Tracy), argue both sides of the heated case, when a twenty-four year old high school science teacher, Bertram Cates, is arrested and charged with violating the town ordinance by teaching evolution and the theories of Charles Darwin in his classroom. The two well known big-mouthed attorneys volunteer their services to battle the issues in the "Bible Belt" community, with

the cynical Baltimore Harold news reporter E. K. Hornbeck (Gene Kelly) sponsoring the young teacher to hire on Drummond as his defense counsel. Swift-talking Hornbeck is the only civilian to welcome the openly proud agnostic Drummond into town, while little Hillsboro throws Brady a parade. The two former friends and now public and political rivals battle it out over a young man's career and livelihood. They strut around the courtroom making sly remarks, swift jabs, and low blows about their opponent's personal achievements and prowess. With the town, the jury, and the judge overwhelmingly biased, it is clear the case will be lost by the defendant, but the two rivals continue to try to outsmart and belittle each other in court. Finally, after much drama and little progress, the jury deliberates and returns with a guilty verdict. However, just before the jury reads their findings a government official approaches the bench and explains to the judge that the trial and persecution of this liberal-minded young teacher was bad press and would not be received favorably in the upcoming political campaign. It would be best if the case would just "go away." So the judge gives Cates a simple fine of one hundred dollars. Cates' final punishment astounds Hillsboro and outrages Brady, but the ruling is final. Drummond quickly rebuts and calls for an appeal and the courtroom erupts in a frenzy. The final scenes of the movie show a chaotic courtroom with reporters swarming, cameras flashing, and children running and playing on the judge's bench. Somewhere among the ruckus unseen is the defendant, his reaction undocumented.

The cinematography in this film is very symbolic and in many ways melodramatic and satirical, bolstering the way the film seems to mock the trivial nature of the legal system and how attorneys get carried away with their own personal and political motives. The satire is evident in the parade the town throws for Brady as he arrives into town,

singing biblical hymns, marching up and down the roads with bold signs and banners, and making it a clear public spectacle with the entire town in attendance dancing and cheering. Viewers see children and adults both buying food and running through the town, all to catch a glimpse of Brady, the man who is going to save the young teacher's soul. The crowds even go as far as replacing biblical names in their hymns with Brady's name, as if he were indeed the second coming of their lord and savior, when in fact he is secretly in bed with the devil. Very few people of the small town realize that Drummond and Brady are in fact friends who battle in public to advance their own particular political beliefs. By day, the town's people chant Brady's name and by night they burn stuffed figures of Drummond, while the two "rivals" sit together reminiscing and sharing laughs. The film goes out of its way to highlight the absurdity of the media, which plays into the chaos created by the two clashing attorneys. The case is never really about the defendant. No one really cares about this poor teacher's right to teach evolution. Instead, the focus is on the two famous litigators who battle over a hot-buttoned political issue, and as a result the defendant is lost among the masses. These two attorneys fail as advocates but succeed greatly as political mouthpieces who fail to represent their clients' rights.

The Verdict

The third movie studied among my research is much newer: the 1982 courtroom drama *The Verdict*, starring Paul Newman, who plays Frank Galvin, a once budding Boston attorney. Galvin, far from his prime, is now an alcoholic ambulance chaser who has managed to lose all of his cases within the last four years. As a favor to his friend Mickey Morrissey (Jack Warden), Galvin takes what is presented as an open and shut

medical malpractice suit against a Catholic hospital in Boston that carelessly caused a young woman to have irreversible brain damage as a result of a lapse in judgment when the patient went into cardiac arrest. Galvin was assured a healthy settlement from the deal, and the case would never see the inside of a courtroom. Galvin was promised a third of the settlement as an incentive, enough money to secure his sloppy and drunken lifestyle. However, his feelings quickly change when he decides to see the patient in the hospital. He is deeply moved by the woman's misfortune and finds the determination to turn down the settlement and try the case so that he may seek justice for this poor innocent client. While all of his colleagues are stunned by his decision, Frank Galvin feels some dignity about himself for the first time and feels that taking this case may be his only vindication from his troubled and less-than-ethical past behavior.

Still, the trial proves less than an easy road for him, more of a metaphorical penance. Very quickly Galvin's case begins to unravel before him as his star expert medical witness is threatened and forced to leave the country, while his last minute substitute's credentials are torn apart on the witness stand. The deck is further stacked as the opposing counsel Ed Concannon (James Mason) uses the press and his large legal team, and the presiding judge (Milo O'Shea) takes great strides to poke holes in Galvin's questioning. Frank's case grows weaker by the minute as witnesses drop like flies and refuse to testify about anything that may have gone wrong with the patient, presumably out of fear. Desperate for a break, Galvin flies to New York to find the only witness that was present during the procedure who he hasn't already asked to testify. It is on this trip that Mickey informs his dear friend that the opposing counsel Concannon hired a spy posing as Galvin's lover, Laura (Charlotte Rampling). After hearing this news there is

clear evidence to have the case thrown out and retried, but Frank refuses to give in and decides to pursue a settlement for his client so that she may be taken care of by her family. Frank Galvin's only viable witness finally agrees to testify and tells her story about how she was forced to change medical records after the horrific incident in question. Her testimony stuns the courtroom and rattles the hospital's case. A flustered Concannon tries to discredit the woman's testimony, and the judge even has her testimony stricken from the record. Galvin makes his last plea, begging the jury to find the truth and seek justice in favor of his client. The jury takes their deliberation and comes back with one question for the judge: whether they are limited to the amount the plaintiff sought. The judge replied no, they may exceed the limit if they wish, and Frank Galvin had won his impossible case and restored some dignity to himself: a man who before was considered lost among unethical carefree gluttons of the human existence.

The Verdict is filled with intense music and high volume actors that help give a third dimension to the tension of the case and its importance to Frank Galvin. The dull lighting and polyester suits make for a classic experience for the viewer, playing on the expectations of the well dressed, almost tacky lawyers who stand tall by day and wallow in basements of bars by night, especially in the case of the protagonist. The factor that makes this film special is the contrast made gradually throughout the film between Galvin's deep-seated depression, his stressful court case, and his gradual self redemption. Through this process, he finds compassion for his clients again and starts to care about himself because he realizes that, as an advocate, he must be his best to give adequate representation for those who cannot stand for themselves. It is only when Galvin has all of his faculties present that he prevails for his client, for the first time in four years.

The Firm

The Verdict is a great lead into the fourth film of my research, the 1993 legal thriller *The Firm*. While this movie was highly popular for its racy and farfetched plot, the basic essence of the film says many things about lawyers, law school, and competition in the work force after graduation. *The Firm* tells the story of Mitchell McDeere (Tom Cruise), freshly graduated from Harvard Law School and happily married to his high school and college sweetheart, Abby. Mitchell came from a troubled background, struggling with his oldest brother Ray's unfortunate incarceration and his other brother Rusty's death in Vietnam, and waiting tables to support himself through school. He was one of the top nine students in his law school class, with an eager and full-hearted disposition to practicing law. There is no question that Mitch McDeere is high in demand and remains modest about his outlook as he receives offers from New York and Chicago law firms, among others. However, he holds out for the highest bidder, determined to make a decent life for his family. Finally Mitch decides to join Bendini, Lambert and Locke, a small tax law firm in Memphis, Tennessee, which entices the poor eager student with an unusually large salary, a lease to a brand-new Mercedes convertible, a house furnished for their convenience, and full payment of all of his student loans. This was in fact an offer too good to refuse.

Soon after he joins the firm, Mitch is hit with a heavy study schedule for the bar, studying day and night becoming more and more absent from home. Nonetheless, McDeere's picture perfect career becomes tainted when two of his colleagues die in a mysterious scuba diving accident while on a business vacation in the Cayman Islands.

The deaths shake him greatly, but Mitchell keeps his head down and continues to work furiously. However, Mitchell starts to find the deaths of his colleagues rather suspicious when at their funeral he notices plaques honoring several other attorneys who worked for the same firm and died in a very similar manner. To satisfy his curiosity, Mitch hires a private investigator, Eddie Lomax (Gary Busey) to investigate the deaths of his former colleagues. Lomax discovers that all five of the deceased lawyers died under greatly suspicious circumstances, all some kind of accident on a business vacation. When Lomax reports back to Mitch he cautions him that if he does not tread lightly he could end up in a grave himself, soon after which Lomax is murdered.

Back at work, McDeere makes the second highest score on the bar exam and is welcomed with a celebration at the office. Still basking in the joy of his success, he is confronted by an FBI agent who explains to him that his firm is actually one of many white collar operations of an infamous crime family out of Chicago. It turns out all of the generous expenditures used to lure Mitchell to the firm were a huge ploy to keep him, like other associates, under the thumb of the firm. The furniture in the house is bugged. The car is traceable, and the compensation is unparalleled to any other firm. It is made clear that associates are closely watched and encouraged to build families and have several children so that they become invested in the firm, and once that happens the aforementioned associate is debriefed on what it is the firm actually does. But by the time of the debriefing the associate has too much to lose to try to quit or tell the authorities. No lawyer has escaped the firm and survived long enough to tell about it.

Out of desperation, Mitch decides to cut a deal with the FBI in exchange for two million dollars and the release of his brother from prison, given that he provides enough

evidence to indict the firm. McDeere, with the help of Lomax's lover and inept secretary, begins to copy confidential documents and make plans to deliver them to the FBI.

Meanwhile, partners at the firm become suspicious of Mitch and with the assistance of inside connections on the FBI they discover his plan. Once Mitch becomes aware that he is being chased from both sides he flees from both the firm and the FBI with his brother. Mitch manages to go off the radar and escapes to the Caribbean. He finally manages to stay out of sight long enough to copy enough documents to indict the firm and delivers the documents to the FBI as planned. And finally Mitch, Abby, and his brother (now in love with Lomax's secretary) go off into hiding to enjoy their wealth and a life of freedom.

The storyline of this film centers on Mitch and his resistance to being used as a pawn by his firm. He wants the right to own his life and have the opportunity to escape from his career to his family. However, in his circumstance, as dramatic and farfetched as it may be, he holds true to the simple values he held closest to him. Before he joined the firm he wanted so desperately to leave his little tattered apartment, but what he neglected to realize was that was something he owned and built legitimately. Part of what Mitch highlights as an issue in his struggle is the value of an honest day's work and letting others dictate how you compromise your ethics. Still, this is a dramatized idealist example of what a lawyer ought to do in the face of a largely unlikely situation in which your life is at stake. The most important point here is not to imitate but to learn. Most of the things an audience finds entertaining about a movie are not the things that we end up taking from the movie and using to make judgments and decisions about ourselves and

others; it's the little things that your conscious mind misses but your unconscious mind loves to toy with.

Legally Blonde

The final film in my exploration of cinema and the processes of the legal profession is the most recent, and the only comedy. *Legally Blonde*, made in 2001, is about an undergraduate senior and professional sorority girl Elle Woods (Reese Witherspoon) who is majoring in fashion merchandising and is deeply in love with her tall, rich and handsome boyfriend Warner Huntington III, who is set to attend Harvard Law School the following year. All set for marriage, Elle is devastated when Warner breaks things off with her in search of someone more serious to boost his future political career. In an absurd and desperate plea for Warner's affection, Elle rigorously studies for the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT) and makes almost a perfect score. With her ace in hand, Elle applies and is accepted into Harvard Law School. Elle's over glamorous and ditsy disposition makes her stand out and she is often looked down upon, and as a bigger dismay Warner is in the arms of another woman. It isn't until she is embarrassed at a party that she realizes Warner never respected her and her bubbly blonde sorority girl image.

Determined to prove her ex-lover wrong, Elle studies hard and receives an offer for an internship with Dr. Callahan on campus, as does her ex Warner and his new flame. Together the trio will work with attorney Emmett Richmond (Luke Wilson) to defend Brooke Taylor-Wyndham, a famed fitness instructor accused of murdering her wealthy and much older husband Hayworth Wyndham. Brooke was also Elle's former fitness

instructor and member of her sorority. While Elle proclaims Brooke's innocence; Brooke's step daughter and cabana boy claim that they saw Brooke standing over her husband's dead body covered in what appeared to be his blood. Brooke refuses to provide an alibi, but when Elle visits her in prison, she finally admits to having been in a cosmetic surgical procedure during the time of the murder. Brooke kept her alibi a secret for so long out of fear that it would ruin her reputation as a fitness guru. Elle vows to keep the secret.

Meanwhile, Vivian, Warner's new flame starts to warm up to Elle and things are looking up. Elle helps shatter the prosecution's case with a few sly questions to the cabana boy about a pair of designer shoes, discounting his credibility when he accidentally admits to being a homosexual after openly admitting to having an affair with Brooke. Tensions rise when Callahan makes a pass at Elle; she quickly rejects him. Vivian sees the come-on but not the rejection and lashes out at Elle for gaining points in such an unethical manner. Elle considers quitting law school but is encouraged to continue on thanks to a female Harvard faculty member. Elle then fires back telling Brooke and Vivian about her encounter with Callahan, and Brooke promptly fires him as her counsel. Without a lawyer Brooke doesn't hesitate in hiring Elle as her attorney with Emmett as supervising counsel. In the murder case, Elle finally gets Chutney, Hayworth's daughter to admit to accidentally shooting her father, thinking it was Brooke. Elle uses quick critical thinking in her cross examination of Chutney in order to deduce the truth and discover Chutney's plan to kill Brooke out of revenge for marrying her wealthy father at such a young age. As Brooke and her legal team celebrate in their victory after the trial, Warner attempts to reconcile with Elle. Elle quickly rejects Warner

for being such a “bonehead.” As the film ends, Elle graduates with high honors and is invited to one of Boston’s best law firms. Elle is now dating Emmett and Vivian has become her best friend. Vivian finally decides to break off her romance with Warner who graduates with no honors and receives no job offers.

No doubt Elle’s story is an absurd fictional account of the trials and tribulations of law school. At first glance this movie seems to be a mockery of the hard work, struggles and efforts of lawyers and law students, but the point of my research in this movie is to examine what it tells its audience about lawyers, law students, and the lives they live. Behind the comedic element and the impossible plot twists, this story is about a student who is stereotypically unfit for law school, who is determined and works hard to achieve her goals no matter how ridiculous and down right idiotic. This film has something to say about the work ethic of law students and to what lengths someone might go to in order to find their niche in a business that is catty, competitive and sometimes unwilling to accept you. However, there is no way one can watch this movie and not notice the stereotypes and jokes poked at the type of people who choose to enter law school, the type of people who become attorneys, and the rest of the community that values labels more than intellect. The insults and jokes come from both sides, which a relief in this comedy. The filmmakers paint a picture of a woman who has no concept of formal logic patterns making a nearly perfect score on a test that many students slave over for months and still have trouble making a decent score. Not to mention that woman decides to go to Harvard Law School of all places to chase a man. As a female there is a definite perception of the lengths women will go to chase their love interest, caring as much, if not more than men about the real purpose of law school. It seems while the youth in this story seem to care

too much about things that do not matter; the older legal minds have little to no perception of the joy in life. *Legally Blonde* says something important but subtle about the changes people encounter and what they sacrifice for their career.

The cinematography in *Legally Blonde* is largely pronounced by Elle's wardrobe. The bright lighting and the loud and animated colors among the dark, conservative and often drab suits of the other attorneys and judges among the legal system intensifies the light, airy, comical essence that Elle brings to the plot line. The lighting and wardrobe compliments the humor of the dumb blonde stereotype that ultimately proves to be incorrect. The stereotype of blondes is very prevalent in this film, hence the title; but it also helps to shed light on the stereotype of the atmosphere of the legal system and how routine and conservative the practices are. While Elle plays the smarter-than-average sorority girl with her bright pink and pastel designer clothing and embellished study utensils, the other law students and attorneys wore dark traditional and sometimes outdated garb in addition to being filmed in a darker light, as if to say those in the legal profession are uptight, judgmental, and stuck in a close minded and outdated mentality.

C. Jokes

The last endeavor into my research is an exploration of the meaning of humor and lawyers. What is humor and what is its purpose in influencing the perceptions and ideas about the legal profession as well as law school? Humor is relative to each individual and comprised of many factors including a certain wit or intellect that provides a believable foundation and the logical setup for the mirth: the comical release that evokes spontaneous laughter. The equation works much like baking a dessert dish from scratch:

depending on the cook and their own personal prowess is the joke influential, accurate, inaccurate, ironic, and/or funny.

There are several common thoughts on why humans use humor: One is a superiority theory, which suggests that people make fun of others to feel superior. An example of a superiority joke is when someone magnifies or hyperbolizes a negative attribute of someone or something. A second explanation is the belief that humor calls conventional social standards into question and is thought of as a relief of that social constraint by pointing out or over exaggerating the strain or oppression of those social standards. Another purpose for humor is the defense mechanism that serves to protect an individual's insecurities or anxieties from the external awareness. When speaking of jokes that target certain groups of people for the sole purpose of creating humor, usually through the use of an anecdote, the main purpose for that type of humor is to demean and make the speaker feel superior or in a place of higher moral or ethical standing than the aforementioned group.

The following jokes are all aimed at lawyers and law students. Keeping in mind the purpose of their humor, it is vital to highlight the particular characteristic in each joke that is being insulted.

1. Lawyer choice

There was a job opening in the country's most prestigious law firm, and it finally came down to Robert and Paul. Both graduated magna cum laude from law school. Both came from good families. Both are equally attractive and well spoken. It's up to the senior partner to choose one, so he takes each aside and asks, "Why did you become a lawyer?" In seconds, he chooses Paul.

Baffled, Robert takes Paul aside. "I don't understand why I was rejected. When Mr. Armstrong asked me why I became a lawyer, I said that I had the greatest respect for the law, that I'd lay down my life for the Constitution, and that all I wanted was to do right by my clients. What in the world did you tell him?"

"I said I became a lawyer because of my hands," Robert replies.

"Your hands? What do you mean?"

"Well, I took a look one day and there wasn't any money in either of them!"
(*"Best Lawyer Jokes"*)

The purpose of this joke is to demean lawyers in such a way that they could only be competent if they valued their money more than they valued the justice system or their clients. This joke plays on the stereotype that lawyers make a substantial amount of money; if this was not expected to be the norm then the joke wouldn't work because he would be in need of appropriate compensation for the purpose of sustaining an average lifestyle. Instead, this anecdote elicits an image of attorneys who live lavish lifestyles and can afford to live that way by demanding more than their fair share of compensation from their clients. The joke suggests that even as a budding attorney with no experience they are trained and expected to be money hungry and follow the cash flow if they are expected to be successful.

2. A huge difference in my client's defense

The day after a verdict had been entered against his client, the lawyer rushed to the judge's chambers, demanding that the case be reopened, saying: "I have new evidence that makes a huge difference in my client's defense."

The judge asked, "What new evidence could you have?"

The lawyer replied, "My client has an extra \$10,000, and I just found out about it!"
(*"Best Lawyer Jokes"*)

Unlike the previous joke this one directly deals with due process and court proceedings. This joke hinges on the assumption that lawyers contribute to the dysfunction and slow-moving processes of the legal system in efforts of collecting more of the almighty billable hours. This joke goes a few layers deeper than the previous,

suggesting that clients' rights only matter as long as they have the funds to provide the service of counsel, and even after the job is done the attorney will unnecessarily draw out the legal process or pretend to advocate for a client's rights as an excuse to provide access to their funds. Again this joke is about the assumption of money-hungry lawyers but also their willingness to deceive their clients, pretending to work harder and longer for their cause when they just want the billable hours.

3. A criminal lawyer

What is a criminal lawyer?

Redundant.

("Best Lawyer Jokes")

This third joke describes the work environment of attorneys. Its humor plays on the perception that there are too many criminal attorneys, eliciting images such as "ambulance chasers," which are characterized again as money hungry lawyers who wade outside hospitals to catch a wrongful death, injury, liability, or some other case that would likely involve suing a multimillion dollar hospital or outside company that may or may not be liable but will likely result in some type of settlement. In addition, the joke also implies to the audience that attorneys are actually the real criminals and are the sect in society to be considered dangerous, based on their manipulative disguise. The thing about criminal lawyers is that as long as there are laws and there are people who have to abide by those laws there will always be crime and therefore criminals. And if every criminal has an attorney and every attorney follows the presumptions of the previous joke then the legal system would be inundated with tedious and unnecessary court proceedings. This view is dependent on the assumption that lawyers will take abuse as an

advocate for their clients' rights and do everything they can to earn the most compensation.

4. Difference between a good lawyer and a great lawyer

What's the difference between a good lawyer and a great lawyer?

A good lawyer knows the law. A great lawyer knows the judge.

("Best Lawyer Jokes")

This joke calls into question the ethics and politics that go on in the legal system, suggesting that while there may be good lawyers and they may work hard, nothing makes up for having inside connections to someone who holds higher power than the attorney. This joke also makes use out of the assumption that the judge would also be respondent to the unethical relationship between the lawyer and presiding judge, hinting the shady ethics of the legal system as a whole, which attorneys use to their advantage. If this were true this joke would also undermine the dignity of the counsel by implying that they were doing some kind of favor for the judge, or something other than working to the best of his or her ability.

5. Female Attorney

What's the difference between female prosecutors and terrorists?

You can negotiate with terrorists.

("Lectric Law Library")

As an aspiring female attorney I find this joke to be especially interesting. This joke attacks the stereotypes of women in conjunction with comparing the fierce negotiating tactics of a lawyer to that of a terrorist. Because attorneys are bound to defend the rights of their clients to the best of their ability they must not be pushovers and be stern in their goals to achieve the outcome that is in the best interest of the client.

Negotiations are compromises that are almost always biased to one side or the other and negotiations may or may not be the best way to go for a lawyer depending on the strength of their case. This joke assumes that women are overzealous in their desires to bet all or nothing for their client. This joke does not work if it were not dependent on the double standard that women who must be tough and masculine like men are perceived as irrationally tougher than a man, also playing on the stereotype that women must always get what they want no matter what. The hyperbole in this joke comes from the comparison of a character known to be highly combative and unwilling to compromise by definition (a terrorist) and a woman who by stereotype is even more combative and stubborn.

III. Deductions

In my research of the above, literature, film and humor, I have made several deductions about what these forms of media have to say about entering the legal field and how that might influence someone like me who is preparing to do so. The main themes within the media I've researched are lifestyle, work ethic, motivation, stress on interpersonal, romantic, and familial relationships, and transformations of personal ethical code.

A. Lifestyle and the Effects on Interpersonal Relationships

What have I learned about what popular media says about the way lawyers live? The trend in the media that I have witnessed in my research suggests that lawyers work

hard to make a living and endure a lot of stress. The training in enduring the stressors of the legal field seems to start with law school.

I discovered in reading *One L* that entering law school is similar to entering the military in the way that the structure of the training is meant to break their subjects and rebuild them to make the skills needed to execute the tasks of the chosen profession sharper and keener. In doing so, law students are introduced into a new and unique way of living and thinking that can alter and disrupt predating interpersonal relationships. As Turow points out in his book, he became a different person. Whether the change endured in law school is positive or negative, in many respects a law school graduate like a soldier after training is a different person. In Turow's case he disliked what law school had made him, because he was felt forced to be purposely unkind to his fellow classmates in order to be successful. The stressors in training force students to tailor their thinking and perceptions of how they see the world around them. In law school you are relative to those around you. Turow had to do whatever he deemed necessary in order to succeed, and sometimes that meant crippling others from doing the same. This is not a price he felt willing to pay.

As in *The Paper Chase*, it is stated that what makes or breaks a law school graduate is either the grades or the suit. One must either prove themselves to be the most competent at what they have been trained to do or they must do a spectacular job looking the part. Hart is already feeling enough pressure just to fit in and be a commendable student by his own standards, but the additional pressure is added when he realizes that he must wear his academic success on his back like a target for everyone who falls

behind him to see so that they may do whatever is in their power to take his place or exceed him so they can start a decent career once they graduate.

In both *The Paper Chase* and *One L*, Osborne and Turow depict marriages that are affected by the stress of law school. Turow himself was married going into law school and describes in his book how the separation between him and his wife caused communication and time management issues. While Turow was slaving over his law books in the library his wife was home alone missing her husband and feeling neglected. In *The Paper Chase*, the main character Hart knows a couple in a similar predicament. In this case the wife tried to be happy by engaging in activities with the other law students' wives. However, she did not feel comfortable and share the same interests; the lifestyle did not interest her and it only fostered resentment toward her husband for putting her in a situation that she did not ask to be in. The relationship between these couples is telling in the way that when you enter into the new lifestyle of the legal field (including law students) and all the stressors that come along with that job or training, that lawyer or law student brings their loved ones (particularly their significant others) along for the ride. The stress is not just one sided. Where one partner must devote most of his or her time to this new career path the other must pick up the slack. It may not be so much that the stress by itself causes dysfunction among couples, but the transition that forces a redistribution of duties among couples is what seems to be the most damaging. It is very important to note that the transition into the legal field changes interpersonal dynamics and the priorities of all involved. Given the change or metamorphosis, if you will, it's only natural that one may have to adjust his or her close circle of friends and may be forced to leave lovers behind.

Graduating law students and “baby lawyers” (as my close attorney friends like to call them) are starting a new life that is likely leaps and bounds different from the life they were used to before law school. It proves hard to communicate or relate to someone who has a unique and sharply critical legal mind if you have not had similar training yourself. This is clear in *Inherit the Wind* in the relationship between Drummond and Brady. Both of the two loud courageous attorneys had been quite close friends before they entered their legal career. But in doing so, Drummond found a liberal and critical approach to his personal philosophies about religion and creationism. In other words, the process can alter one’s personal perceptions of the world such that even fellow lawyers can be far more critical than they were previously. Many times personal ethics and beliefs are what bond people together in interpersonal relationships, and when those basic beliefs change the foundation of the relationship it causes turmoil. It is expected that when people enter the law profession or legal training they may find new friends who relate the most with them. This is not to say that any friends one has before they enter law school will become enemies, but it is highly probable that friends who are not experiencing the same stressors will become more distant because there is less to talk about and less to relate to. While old friends may become distant it is also highly probable that one will engage in new relationships adjusting to the new lifestyle. The main hurdle that seems to impede upon this thought is that when law school is so competitive in nature it seems as though it may be hard for law students to find friends who value them instead of trying to outdo them. Given the stress and the competition, law seems like it has great potential to be a lonely place. However, that does not mean that one cannot make friends and be successful at the same time. It is very possible for people to balance the two. Still, one

must be prepared for those who have no interest the well being of others and are only looking out for their own career.

Though the new environment may take some time to get use to, there is nothing that says law school will in fact be hell on earth for three years. But it does seem to be the best tactic to be aware that the experience will likely not be easy, the people likely not so nice, hours long and effects of stress significant. In *The Verdict*, the stress of the legal career drives Galvin to drink in excess, and in *The Firm* it ultimately causes Mitch and his wife to separate. In many ways the life of Mitchell McDeere parallels the life of Scott Turow as he narrates his book *One L*. Both were married and hit with an enormous work load that took an inevitable toll on their private relationships, begging the question: When do things get better, or is this adult life? Maybe that's what led Galvin to his alcohol dependence in *The Verdict*. Galvin was burned out by his job; his career was depressing and he was no longer satisfied. After a long string of legal losses he gave up hope in his profession and was quickly on his way to losing his license to practice law. He was burnt out by the competition and cut-throat antics of his opponents. The film begs the question: when those you are competing with fight dirty, how can you continue to fight fair and lose in good conscious? At some point in his career Galvin gave up caring and started self-medicating with heavy drinking. Stress leading to substance abuse is not uncommon. And although this is a Hollywood film, the plot is not much of a stretch of the imagination; however, Galvin's story is dramatized.

While *The Verdict* is a dramatization of a worse case scenario, the outcome is plausible and someone could easily suffer the same fate. Along the same lines, Mitch in *The Firm* also felt pressure from his career to act in a manner he felt was unbecoming of

what an attorney should be. Although working for the mob after graduating law school is not a likely scenario for most, the premise of a professional stressed and behaving badly still stands. Mitch was given the lifestyle that he always dreamed of for him and his family, but it ultimately turned sour when his wild antics concerning his job caused his wife to leave. It was then Mitch realized that the blood of innocent attorneys and the destruction of his marriage was a price too big to pay. There may be some things in the legal profession that one does not like doing and the stress of that task may prove to be immensely worrisome to the attorney, but the whole premise of law school is intended to help strengthen future attorneys to deal with situations they find highly stressful and/or worrisome so that it may not take an immediate toll on their mental or physical health. The instances pointed out in the media I have researched does not doom anyone entering the legal profession to the same fate, but it suggests a strong correlation between stress, relationship turmoil, and deviant behavior that has a significant likelihood of taking place. It is true that attorneys can be greatly compensated for their legal services, as suggested in *The Firm* and many of the jokes outlined, but none of the media I research suggested that the compensation was a greater factor outweighing the worst cases scenarios of stress and dysfunction.

B. Morals and Ethics

Lawyers are expected to hold to some of the highest standards of ethics in their career. However, the real life perceptions of lawyers and how they conduct themselves in their practices are often less than flattering. In my research I find two distinct portrayals of attorneys and their personal ethics: In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the reader is presented

with a very ideal and dramatic portrayal of an attorney who always takes the high road both in his personal life and in his legal practice, even against great pressure to do the opposite. He is the ideal single father, the prim and proper professional man who still manages to think of himself and all others as humans and nothing less. The portrayal of Atticus Finch gives readers and aspiring lawyers a sense of hope among the harsh perceptions of the legal profession. This novel says not only is it possible to have good personal ethics in a world that is often biased and unethical, but that not all lawyers are inherently corrupt, as the public often sees in media.

It is very telling of the character that attorneys are meant to uphold when Atticus decides to defend a black man accused of assaulting a white woman. In order to understand the impact of Atticus' actions one must also understand the social associations of that time period with black men and their relationship with white women. In those times white women were still in some respects considered property of the men in their lives, to be kept on a pedestal and highly regarded. Conversely, black men weren't even considered men, often referred to as "boy," so that white men may assert their dominance over them. Black men were not to look at white women, let alone touch them. It was often thought that black men lusted after white women and had a certain primal sexual urge that was beyond their control. Given the type of culture that believes in those racist ideas it could have been considered a career-ending move on the part of Atticus to willingly and wholeheartedly defend a man so hated by the larger community. Still, Atticus never bats an eye at being an advocate for a black man. He does what lawyers are supposed to do: stand up for the rights of someone who cannot do it for himself. Despite the pressure and the threats and inadvertently putting his children in harms way, Atticus'

strong sense of moral fiber never wavers. While the manner in which Atticus' character is portrayed is overwhelmingly idealistic, it serves as a good template for aspiring and practicing attorneys alike who may find themselves faltering under the pressure of a larger immoral or unjust social climate.

In *Inherit The Wind*, the audience is presented with two attorneys who steer the pressing matter away from the law and create their own spotlight in order to preach their political agendas. The film is characterized by many bombastic moments in which the two attorneys who banter back and forth about whether there is a factual possibility supporting creationism. Many of the moments in the film include the courtroom bursting into laughter as one attorney makes sarcastic remarks towards the other's appearance or political career. The issue at hand is hardly discussed and illustrates two highly trained legal minds fussing like little children, as if to suggest that court proceedings are more about the showcasing of the legal counsel instead of about the actual facts of the case. The film suggests that the outcome of a trial is more indicative of who uses the better rhetoric than who has built the most plausible argument.

Although this film is a highly dramatized portrayal of ethics and motivations of attorneys in relation to their clients, it characterizes the issue quite well. What is more important to attorneys: their own political agenda or defending the rights of their client? There is no doubt that lawyers are trained to be great litigators, proving their point with their fierce legal wit. However, at some point lawyers can confuse and misuse the tools they were given in law school, using them as their own instead of for the good of others. It is not my deduction that all attorneys always misuse their legal prowess or that they are even aware that they are doing so. What I have deduced is that the phenomena can take

place. Still, the illustration of lawyers in my study of humor does suggest that lawyers knowingly care more about their own personal interests than their clients, valuing and respecting them very little, as if to say no one cares about the little guy. Money, political clout, having inside connections, winning more cases by whatever means necessary, while appearing to be an upstanding advocate and silently draining their clients' limited financial resources dry become the real name of the game.

In the joke "A Huge Difference in My Client's Defense," it is suggested that a lawyer cares more about compensation than anything else, only hiding monetary motivations under the cloak of advocacy. It is not my belief or deduction that all lawyers wish to cheat their clients out of their well earned money, but I do come to the conclusion that lawyers try to make the most out of their jobs through billable hours and have a great monetary compensation for doing so. Therefore, while an attorney is filing more appeals and spending more time coming up with legal strategies, there is an increased assumption of a legal victory while the attorney is racking up many billable hours. It seems as though this is a win-win situation no matter what the lawyer's motivations are for spending the time on the case, but unfortunately those who are outside the profession assume the worst.

I do believe that the financial burden one carries to go through law school may make compensation an unfortunate, intrinsic first priority, but that is not the case of all attorneys. The one real life instance in *Storming the Court* proved to discount the broader unfavorable perception of lawyers. In this book, young lawyers and their professor stood up to the definition of an attorney and advocated for the "little guy." Goldstein's piece puts hope in today's young generation, specifically law students. Although there are

many parts of the legal system that are misguided and have lost their strong moral compass, their intercessions are no more prevalent than those of any other job; lawyers are just human, nothing more nothing less. The actions of the law students illustrated in Goldstein's book puts a good taste in readers' mouths, in the hopes that graduating law students can learn to be compassionate advocates despite the competition and stress and continue to do so in their career.

C. Law School Expectations and Stressors

As discussed previously, *One L* is a great predictor of how the first year of law school can change your life. Turow's book illustrates the fierce competition between students, the challenging course material, and even, as in *The Paper Chase*, a concern about not only the lifestyle of a law school student but the relationship with professors as well. Hart does not understand why his professor is seemingly so cold, calculating, and distant; it is my deduction that the stress and isolation that are often attached to the stress of a legal career are in some manner impeded by his professor's social skills. To Dr. Kingsfield, nothing seems more important than his legal prowess; after all, what really matters is the suit or the grades. Hart's professor's characteristics really shed light on Hart and his inability to adjust to an environment that is unlike any that he has been use to before, and if he wants to become a lawyer, he will likely follow suit. Turow tells his readers that the first year of law school can corrupt your self image and how you respect others. If law students are trained to disrespect and abuse their peers as a result of their learning environment, how can they respect their clients when they graduate?

After having thought critically about the positive and negative aspects of law school's competitive nature I have deduced that as a result of the tough structure and the stressful atmosphere to prepare their students for the legal workforce, there are bound to be negative consequences. And I feel very strongly that one of the biggest consequences of the intense legal training is that some students cannot compete fairly and constructively or productively. Instead of making the best out of the pressure and working toward a goal with the intent of causing as little collateral damage to your peers as possible, some are purely destructive and create many of the rumors and horror stories people hear about law school. *The Paper Chase* illustrates a law student who hoped to get more out of law school than just a fine education. He hoped to gain a mentor and put his professor on a pedestal when he was no different than any other professor or attorney.

I deduce that there is no idealism in law school. One cannot go into law school with the intent of learning how to become Atticus Finch. Everyone is looking out for themselves: friends are often artificial and relationships often fail. It is a hard knock life being a law student. If one learns to be independent anywhere, it's in law school. I expect law school to be a rather lonely experience. As your close interpersonal circle changes and loved ones don't recognize you anymore; those who can relate are forced not to care about you. Of course there are always exceptions to the rule, but one must be prepared for the common occurrence. It seems to me that law school is the cocoon, where students learn, evolve and emerge reborn into an altered lifestyle and a new outlook on life that may or may not be conducive to the life they lead prior to their experience. It seems life begins when you officially become a lawyer, but the road leading you there is hard and

oftentimes not thought worth traveling, but one must remember it's always darkest before the dawn and the sun also rises.

IV. Conclusion

As someone who will soon be entering law school, this process and research was very important to me and proved to be very beneficial in preparing myself for the long road ahead. I believe that although I have done this research and will have some clue of what to expect, there is no better preparation than experience. Thus, getting adjusted to the environment will be my biggest hurdle. Due to the competitive nature of law school, it is kind of like a game or social experiment that one must learn and master quickly if expected to succeed. In many respects I do see myself feeling like Elle Woods: out of place, a little fish in a shark tank, so to speak. There is no doubt that I am nervous and somewhat fearful of my experiences to come. Law school is a big investment and it is not something to consider doing half-ass. You are either all in or not in at all. Although there were not many things I felt I could take seriously about *Legally Blonde*, I do feel there is something to be said about Elle's character and her determination and ability as a blonde woman entering a career dominated by dark-haired men. She maintained a determination and strong work ethic, using her unique perspective to her advantage. Sure, the example in this movie is a bit absurd, but the very premise is a silver lining of inspiration. Being an ethnic female entering a field dominated by mostly white men I expect to feel somewhat underrepresented and feel some sort of identity struggle about what it means to be a double minority in the legal field, given the expectations of women with some sort of power or status. Like the female attorney joke I presented previously, women are

expected to be the stubborn bulldogs that seemingly overcompensate for their gender, constantly having something to prove to their male counterparts. While I do feel as though I have something to prove being a female, especially a black female entering law school, I do not wish to overcompensate or assert the fact that I am different. I simply wish to be capable and confident in my abilities to practice law and ideally erase any perceptions of difference or inequality. I expect to be tested, struggle, and doubt myself, but what I find to be most important is to keep in mind why I chose to become a lawyer in the first place and try my best to not let any negative experiences I have overshadow that.

My worst fear is to feel like Scott Turow in *One L*. I don't think there could be anything worse than having invested all my resources into getting to law school only to feel as though it has made me a less moral person than when I first started. While I value what Turow says in his book and find his accounting to have opened my eyes the most to the stressors and possibly terrible things that may happen along the way, I am determined not to have the same experience. I expect to question many things, but I don't feel as though I can afford to regret and have the high hopes that law school will likely be a three year vacation in hell but well worth the trip.

In the end, media are someone else's interpretations on a common experience, and my goal here was to find a common thread between many media and use that as a guiding light in my journey ahead. Everyone's journey is unique, and mine will be like no one else's but I do not exempt myself from the experiences I have found in my research. I think I will be tempted and stressed much like many of the characters in the works I have studied, and I will often be subject to the same ridicule outlined in the humor I presented,

but ultimately I have the last say in what I partake in and what I choose to be an important factor in my legal career. I expect to be presented with the need to create a new life for myself, a life that includes new friends and an alteration in the relationship with my family. The changes in my new lifestyle I feel will overwhelmingly be for the better, although it may not look that way at first. I may be tempted to resist this change, but I believe it is something I have to do and appreciate in order to love my profession as a practicing attorney. The biggest changes I expect to make are in the way I process and analyze material and the way I present myself. If there is anything I have learned in this process it is that being an attorney is just as much about the strategy as it is the know how. One must not only think like a lawyer but be a lawyer inside and out, never taking off the professional suit like Atticus Finch.

References

1. "Best Lawyer Jokes." BestLawyerJokes.com, 2011. Web, 10 May 2011. <<http://www.bestlawyersjokes.com/>>.
2. Goldstein, Brant. *Storming the Court: How a Band of Yale Law Students Sued The President and Won*. New York: Scribner, 2005, Print.
3. *Inherit The Wind*. Dir. Stanley Kramer. Perf. Tracy, Spencer. United Artists: 1960, Film.
4. *Legally Blonde*. Dir. Robert Luketic. Perf. Witherspoon, Reese. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer: 2001, Film.
5. Osborn, John J. *The Paper Chase*. Brooklyn, New York: Fawcett Books Group, 1978, Print.
6. "The Best Lawyer Q and A Jokes." The 'Lectric Law Library, 2011. Web, 10 May 2011. <<http://www.lectlaw.com/files/fun15.htm>>.
7. *The Firm*. Dir. Sydney Pollack. Perf. Cruise, Tom. Paramount Pictures: 1993, Film.
8. *To Kill A Mockingbird*. Dir. Robert Mulligan." Perf. Peck, Gregory. Universal Pictures: 1962, Film.
9. *The Verdict*. Dir. Sidney Lumet. Perf. Newman, Paul. 20th Century Fox: 1982, Film.
10. Turow, Scott. *One L*. New York: Warner Books Inc., 1977, Print.

REVERSE ENGINEERING THE CRYSTAL BALL:
WHAT MEDIA PORTRAYALS SAY ABOUT PREPAIRING FOR A CAREER IN
LAW

Thesis Supervisor:

Gilbert D. Martinez, J.D.
School of Journalism & Mass Communication

Second Reader:

Diann McCabe, M.F.A.
University Honors Program

Approved:

Heather C. Galloway, Ph.D.
Director of the University Honors Program