

Public Interest Law Entertainment Guide

A list of books and movies that will educate and inspire. The arts can be a powerful agent for moving people, and play a crucial role in shifting narratives and mobilizing communities.



Movies

Below are a list of movies and documentaries with social justice messages.

[Gideon's Army](#)

This HBO documentary covers the lives of three public defenders working in a strained criminal justice system in the Deep South. J

[Erin Brockovich](#)

Erin Brockovich tells the story of a single-mother who begins working for a law firm, where she discovers a suspicious case of land contamination by Pacific Gas and Electric Company. Brockovich then becomes part of one of the largest class action suits in American history.

[A Time to Kill](#)

A Time to Kill tells the story of a young lawyer who defends a man accused of killing the men who raped his daughter. At times infuriating, this story articulates the blurred lines between right and wrong in the criminal justice system.

**EQUAL
JUSTICE
WORKS**

For three decades Equal Justice Works has created opportunities for public interest lawyers committed to building a more just society. We believe that the poorest and most vulnerable among us deserve the same access to justice and quality legal representation as the privileged. To achieve this, we offer a continuum of opportunities for law students and lawyers that provide the training and skills that enable them to provide effective representation to underserved communities and causes.

[A Few Good Men](#)

This film is the story of a military lawyer who defends two Marines accused of murder who claimed they were following orders.

[12 Angry Men](#)

This film classic covers a trial where the jury is faced with evaluating the guilt of man accused of murder.

[A Civil Action](#)

Families sue two companies for dumping toxic waste, which they claim is the reason for the death of their children.

[Amistad](#)

Following a mutiny, a slave ships lands in the United States. Those on board are deemed runaway slaves and are eventually represented by a lawyer who tries to get them released as free citizens of another country.

[To Kill a Mockingbird](#)

Lawyer Atticus Finch defends a black man falsely accused of raping a white woman in the Deep South during the Depression. Finch's children also learn about racism and prejudice. A must-read and American classic book and movie.

[Philadelphia](#)

A man suffering from AIDS is fired by his law firm because of his condition. He hires a homophobic lawyer, who is his only willing legal advocate in his wrongful dismissal suit. Warning: it's a true tearjerker. Keep the Kleenex handy.

[And Justice for All](#)

A lawyer defends a guilty judge, while also defending other innocent clients. He tries to find punishment for the guilty and justice for the innocent.

[True Believer](#)

A former civil liberties attorney who now specializes defending drug dealers becomes transformed by an eight-year-old murder case.

[The Rainmaker](#)

A young unemployed attorney takes on an insurance company who will not pay for a client's life-saving surgery.

[Class Action](#)

This drama is about a lawsuit concerning injuries caused by a defective automobile. The plaintiff's attorney, Jed Ward, is torn because the automobile company's attorney is his estranged daughter.

[Bread and Roses](#)

Two Latina sisters work as cleaners in a downtown office building, and fight for the right to unionize.

Books

[A Civil Action](#)

In this true story of an epic courtroom showdown, two of the nation's largest corporations stand accused of causing the deaths of children. A compelling tale of a legal system gone awry—one in which greed and power fight an unending struggle against justice—*A Civil Action* is also the story of how one determined man can ultimately make a difference.

[To Kill a Mockingbird](#)

Yep, this classic movie is also a great American novel written by author Harper Lee. A must-read!

[The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness](#)

In *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Alexander discusses race-related issues and the cycle of mass incarceration that affects minorities and those of lower socioeconomic status.

[Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption](#)

Bryan Stevenson was a young lawyer when he founded the Equal Justice Initiative, a legal practice dedicated to defending the poor, the wrongly condemned, and women and children trapped in the farthest reaches of our criminal justice system. One of his first cases was that of Walter McMillian, a young man who was sentenced to die for a notorious murder he insisted he didn't commit.

[Groundwork: Charles Hamilton Houston and the Struggle for Civil Rights](#)

A lawyer and educator, Houston laid much of the legal foundation for the landmark civil rights decisions of the 1950s and 1960s. Many of the lawyers who won the greatest advances for civil rights in the courts, Justice Thurgood Marshall among them, were trained by Houston in his capacity as dean of the Howard University Law School. Politically Houston realized that blacks needed to develop their racial identity and also to recognize the class dimension inherent in their struggle for full civil rights as Americans.

[Root and Branch: Charles Hamilton Houston, Thurgood Marshall, and the Struggle to End Segregation](#)

Charles Hamilton Houston laid the groundwork, reinventing the law school at Howard University (where he taught Thurgood Marshall) and becoming special counsel to the NAACP. Later, Houston and Marshall traveled through the South, often at great personal risk, chipping away, case by case, at the legal foundations of racial oppression.

[The Sea Is So Wide and My Boat Is So Small: Charting a Course for the Next Generation](#)

This book discusses the gap between the rich and the poor in the United States, which is often ignored, and has led to further injustice. The founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund, Marian Wright Edelman discusses the suffering of the nation's children, and how the problems they face can be fixed.

[Leadership on the Federal Bench: The Craft and Activism of Jack Weinstein](#)

This book adds to the literature about the policy-making role of district judges applying the work of legal historians, political scientists and those trained in the law. The book focuses on a judicial activist, examining activism at the trial level.

[Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality](#)

Simple Justice covers the history of the landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education* and the struggle for racial equality in this country. Richard Kluger provides the fullest possible view of the human and legal drama in the years before 1954, the cumulative assaults on the white power structure that defended segregation, and the step-by-step establishment of a team of inspired black lawyers that could successfully challenge the law.

[Justice for All: Earl Warren and the Nation He Made](#)

In *Justice for All*, Jim Newton brings readers the first truly comprehensive consideration of Earl Warren, the politician-turned-Chief Justice who refashioned the place of the court in American life through landmark Supreme Court cases whose names have entered the common parlance – *Brown v. Board of Education*, *Griswold v. Connecticut*, *Miranda v. Arizona*.

[The Story of my Life \(Clarence Darrow\)](#)

The Story of My Life recounts and reflects on Darrow's more than fifty years as a corporate, labor, and criminal lawyer, including the most celebrated and notorious cases of his day: establishing the legal right of a union to strike in the Woodworkers' Conspiracy Case; exposing on behalf of the United Mine Workers the shocking conditions in the mines and the widespread use of child labor; defending Leopold and Loeb in the Chicago "thrill" murder case; defending a teacher's right to present the Darwinian theory of evolution in the famous Scopes trial; fighting racial hatred in the Sweet anti-Negro and the Scottsboro cases; and much more. Written in his disarming, conversational style, and full of refreshingly relevant views on capital punishment, civil liberties, and the judicial system, Darrow's autobiography is a fitting final summation of a remarkable life.

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