

## II. Fiction (and Non) as Career Inspiration: Law

In a previous article of this column, I spoke about certain books of fiction that “reveal the workings of real professionals,” so as to be guides for “young adults (YAs) who are trying to understand what a career in science might look like” (archived as #78 at <https://www.murrysvillelibrary.org/>). That article has examples in biology and environmental science. One reader told me how well received that was by her grandson, and has inspired me to write similarly for other professions. This time I will speak to the profession of the law (and lawlessness as well of course).

The American Bar Association’s ABAJournal has selected the “25 Greatest Law Novels Ever” (<https://www.abajournal.com/gallery/25greatestnovels/>). The novels are not so much about the technical aspects of law as they are stories involving the law, morality, and justice done or justice denied.

What better starting point than Atticus Finch in “To Kill a Mockingbird” (1960), Harper Lee’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel set in 1930s Alabama. The “fictional” case about which it deals is that of an African-American man falsely accused of rape, whose innocence is unsuccessfully defended by Atticus Finch. The story is narrated by Atticus’s interesting daughter Scout. The novel is #1 on the ABAJournal list, and described as “the inspiration for tens of thousands of law school applications and, among practicing lawyers, more than a little reflective glory.”

So that Atticus Finch’s case not be thought Harper Lee’s imagination run amuck, fiction yields to actuality in the recounting of a real and horrific instance of falsely accused rape in Gilbert King’s “Devil in the Grove: Thurgood Marshall, the Groveland Boys, and the Dawn of a New America” (2012). This was Marshall risking his own life in lawless mid 20<sup>th</sup> century Florida before becoming a Supreme Court Justice. I am old enough to remember the public hangings of African-American men denied the presumption of innocence in a court of law. Jim Crow at its worst.

“The Caine Mutiny” is a 1951 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Herman Wouk. It is 17<sup>th</sup> on the ABAJournal list, and well known for the film version starring Humphrey Bogart. This novel deals with the law in a fictional military case, believable enough that it might also be rooted in reality.

In between these two classics on the ABAJournal list are novels by Fyodor Dostoevsky, Victor Hugo, Charles Dickens, Herman Melville, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, among others that are well known too. How can one go wrong with that reading list?

Two other Supreme Court Justices of our times have written their own probing, nonfiction books about the law. These do very much get into the technical aspects of the law, but not beyond lay reach. Justice John Paul Stevens authored “Six Amendments: How and Why We Should Change the Constitution” (2014). It is a proposal to address barriers to good governance. Justice Stephen Breyer authored

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“The Court and the World: American Law and the New Global Realities” (2015), among several other books; in it he gives a more worldly perspective of American law.

Just the above small collection of books offers informed reading and a broad peek into what the law profession can be at its best, all at your public Library.

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