

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Themes in Fritz Lang's Films

Media

Fury. Newsreel crews shoot the mob's attack on the jailhouse, and the footage is later used by the prosecutor as state's evidence against the lynchers. The film screening decisively identifies the involvement of the accused and it is considered to be the "first use of newsreel footage in a courtroom". The film's inspirations, the 1933 San Jose lynching (of the culprits a kidnapping case) and the Lindberg trials (of the alleged kidnapper of Charles Lindberg's toddler) had received massive news media coverage.

The Blue Gardenia. The newspaper's printing press gets the spotlight as an impressive instrument of mass production. Newspapers are packed in bundles like other industrial products and eager consumers await their delivery. Norah is subjected to the blinding flashes of reporters' cameras twice: first, after her arrest, and later when she happily leaves the courthouse following her exoneration.

While the City Sleeps. Los Angeles is terrorized by a serial killer and we get to have a closer look at how media reacts and exploits the events. The media mogul Kyne Senior (recalling Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*) dubs the murderer the Lipstick killer and tells his underlings that he wants every woman to be "scared silly" when they put on makeup. His success in journalism evidently stems from his ability to exploit sensational news. When Kyne Junior takes over, the news group continues along the lines established by the founder.

Beyond a Reasonable Doubt. The focus is on the power of media in shaping the public's perception of innocence and guilt. A newspaper publisher and a writer scheme to demonstrate the unreliability of circumstantial evidence in capital punishment verdicts. Television also plays a key role as the emerging medium. Characters watch a nightly show that plays highlights of Garrett's trial and a TV crew is seen at work in the courtroom.