

Reality Courtroom Series: 1949-2005

Accused (ABC, 12/58-9/59)

Half-hour courtroom dramas, featuring a new story and characters each week, but with a recurring judge (Edgar Allan Jones, a UCLA law professor), bailiff (Tim Ferrell), clerk (Jim Hodson), and court reporter (Violet Gilmore). The prosecution and defense were played by real lawyers but actors took the parts of the defendants and witnesses in what were mostly criminal cases. This was a nighttime spinoff from the daytime show *Day in Court* and was known by that name for its first few weeks on primetime. It was produced by Selig Seligman, a former State Department attorney and one of ABC's vice presidents. The stories were based on little-known trials, researched by staff lawyers and law students. *Morning Court*, another daytime show, spun off from *Accused* and starred William Gwinn, the alternating judge from *Day in Court*.

American Justice (A&E, 9/92-present)

The series examines the issues facing the system today--from the death penalty, to drug sentencing, to false confessions, to racial inequities-- through significant cases that have worked their way through the American legal system. The stories are told by the men and women at the heart of those cases: the prosecutors, police officers, defense attorneys, and government officials -- including Johnnie Cochran, Vincent Bugliosi, William Kunstler, Alan Dershowitz, Gerry Spence, and former FBI Director William Webster -- as well as witnesses, defendants, and victims, to find out what really happened and give audiences a way to understand the legal principles at issue. *American Justice* has covered the famous, the infamous and the unknown, including: "Murder in Greenwich: The Martha Moxley Story," "Justice Denied: The Hurricane Carter Story," "The Erin Brockovich Story," and "Why O.J. Simpson Won." (from their website at <http://www.aande.com/tv/shows/amerjustice/index.jsp>)

Arrest & Trial (USA, 9/00-6/01)

Brian Dennehy hosted the show which followed celebrated criminal cases from arrest through trial. Producer Dick Wolfe ("Law and Order") says that it is unabashedly pro-police, pro-prosecutor. It blends dramatizations with news footage and interviews with the investigators and prosecutors who made the case.

The Black Robe (NBC, 5/49-4/50)

Recreated cases from New York City's Night Court were performed live by actors taking the parts of witnesses, defendants and lawyers, but the judge was always played by Frankie Thomas Sr. and the clerk by John Green. On occasion, the actual defendants and witnesses played themselves. First called *Police Night Court*, the series was created by Philips Lord, best known for his radio and television series *Gangbusters* and *Mr. District Attorney*. Competing against wrestling and roller derby on Friday nights, the series lasted only one year.

Blame Game (MTV, 2/99-01?)

The Blame Game reunites ex-boyfriends and jilted girlfriends in a mock courtroom run by Judge Chris Reed (not an actual "your honor," mind you). There, with the help of

Counselors Kara McNamara and Jason Winer, they boo-hoo about embarrassing intimacies, bad habits and incendiary incidents that doomed their coupling. An audience that doesn't know them from mud decides from about 22 minutes of insults and injuries which person is responsible for the breakup. The winner scoots off to Cancun to start another bad relationship. This and next week's losers gets their faces plastered in an ad in *Entertainment Weekly* magazine after delivering a soul-crushing, half-hearted apology to their ex - while kneeling! And just think, you can enjoy this public humiliation from the relative privacy of your stinky old couch! (Melanie McFarlane, "It Could Be Worse, You Could Be on TV", *Seattle Times*, 2/12/99, E1)

Celebrity Justice (Syndicated, 1/02-9/05)

The series covers breaking and current legal issues involving celebrities from movies and the television, sports and music realms, to name a few. Although criminal matters clearly play a role on the show, executive producers and program creators Harvey Levin and Ms. Gregorisch-Dempsey also place the spotlight on topics such as real estate lawsuits and deal-making. The series features recurring segments, such as "You Be the Judge," where viewers hear legal arguments in a mock trial, then vote online as an interactive jury panel to decide the case. In "Equal Justice" the show explores whether the celebrity was treated more or less fairly than an ordinary citizen faced with the same situation. The strip also examines the fashion sense of stars at their court dates in "Court Appearances." The website, from <http://celebrityjustice.warnerbros.com/>, also includes documents from celebrity cases, eg., "Martin Lawrence assault suit," "Bob Hope's will," "Pamela Lee Anderson vs. Tommy Lee."

Court of Last Resort (10/57-4/58)

Based on real life cases and made in collaboration with Erle Stanley Gardner. The Court was instituted when Gardner was sent the case files on a penniless, mentally ill man condemned to death for a rape/murder. Carefully reconstructing the crime, Gardner concluded that unless the man could have been in two different places simultaneously, he could not have committed the crime. All appeals had been taken and with the sentence imminent, Gardner stated his case to the governor (later US Supreme Court Justice Earl Warren) and the California Supreme Court. The man was reprieved and eventually found innocent. In 1948 Gardner put together a team of criminal law and forensic experts to investigate cases of defendants who had possibly been unjustly convicted and their work was reported in the pages of *Argosy* magazine for many years. The series starred Lyle Bettger as investigator Sam Larsen and occasionally included Paul Birch playing the real life Gardner.

Courtroom Television Network/Court TV/truTV (7/91-present)

Two proposed real-court channels, Time-Warner/American Lawyer's American Courtroom Network and NBC's In-Court Television, merged into Court TV. It now includes not only live footage from actual trials, but also documentaries, original programming and specials, reruns such as *NYPD* and *COPS*, feature films, tv movies, and original movies, and news commentary. For an interview with Steve Brill, founder of Court TV, see <http://www.emmyonline.org/tvq/articles/27-3-3.asp>. Their website is www.courtstv.com

Courtroom U.S.A. (Syndicated, 1960)

Another series of recreated court cases from California, with regular judge Jay Jostyn.

Crime and Punishment (NBC, 6/02-7/04)

From Dick Wolf -- the creator and executive producer of NBC's hugely successful "Law & Order" franchise -- and Academy Award-winning documentarian Bill Guttentag ("You Don't Have to Die") comes "Crime & Punishment," an hour-long, non-scripted "dramatary" that offers viewers a look at real-life prosecutors as they prepare for and try cases. Edited to have the look and feel of a primetime drama series, "Crime & Punishment" chronicles actual cases brought to trial by the San Diego District Attorney's office, giving viewers an eyewitness view into the criminal justice system. The stories are "as compelling as any fiction you will see on television," says Guttentag, and range from the rape of a young lab technician, the abuse of a 4-year-old girl, a father's murder of his infant son, and a man prosecuted for killing his estranged wife -- even though her body has yet to be found. Filmed in high-definition video, the series combines cinema verité footage -- going behind the scenes with prosecutors as they investigate crimes and prepare for trial -- with three-camera courtroom coverage, giving it the look and feel of a fictional drama series. Three specially-designed, remotely operated cameras were placed inside courtrooms to capture trial proceedings. The deputy district attorneys featured in "Crime & Punishment" include supervisor Eugenia Eyherabide and deputies Dan Goldstein, Jill DiCarlo, Chris Lindberg, and Garry Haehnle -- all from the family protection unit; Lisa Weinreb, Mark Amador, and Michael Runyon from the gang unit; Michael Groch, in the high-tech crimes division; and Blaine Bowman, from the Superior Court Division. (from the official website http://www.nbc.com/Crime_&_Punishment/)

Crimes of Passion (Syndicated, ITC, 1976)

The British syndicator ITC dramatized French crimes of passion and the resulting trials in 60 minute segments. It was largely shown in England and apparently only one independent station in New York picked it up.

Curtis Court (Syndicated, King World Productions, 9/00-2001)

James Curtis, former California prosecutor, ran his tv court with a kinder, gentler hand than those of his competitors. It was also distinguished by the use of expert witnesses, single-trial episodes, and on-location examinations of evidence. The program was shot in New York and used actual cases from that area. Curtis preferred to think of himself as an arbitrator rather than a judge and often looked beyond the end result to find the source of the problem. He left *Curtis Court* to become an anchor on Court TV.

Day in Court (ABC, 10/58-6/65)

Half-hour daytime series that began locally in Los Angeles. The writers created a rough outline of a script, based on real cases, which was then improvised by actors playing the litigants and witnesses, and real attorneys playing the lawyers. The cases were often oddball - in one, a man was accused of trying to rob a bank by using hypnosis. The presiding and alternating judges were Edgar Allan Jones, a law professor at UCLA, and William Gwinn, a former law professor. Jones handled the criminal cases and Gwinn, domestic relations. Top UCLA students were paid to work 5

hours a week on legal research for the cases; their pay was equivalent to 20 hours spent clerking at a firm, and they were expected to spend the the other 15 hours on law review or pro bono work. The show was the highest in daytime ratings until *General Hospital* passed it in 1964. In 1965 ABC decided to turn the courtroom into a bedroom with a soap-style melodrama which also included a trial. Jones refused to continue his role and the show lasted only another 4 months. Jones retired from UCLA in 1991, and as of 2003, he continues to take on labor arbitration cases.

Divorce Court (Syndicated, 1958-69, 1984-91, 9/99-present)

Inspired by the successes of *Perry Mason* and *Traffic Court* (1957) and the realization that trials could be both dramatic and cheaply done, a number of local stations decided to bring a "real" courtroom to the small screen. Among the most successful was KTTV-Los Angeles' *Divorce Court*, which ran in prime time and outrated the network shows. NTA, National Television Associates, an early attempt at a "fourth" network, added *Divorce Court* to its stable. It was the first syndicated program to be offered on the newly-introduced videotape. Actor/lawyer Voltaire Perkins was the judge, and as Bill Walsh quietly narrated the scene, real attorneys tried cases with actors filling in as litigants. The moral aim of the series was to stem the "rising tide of divorce" but its subject matter was usually of a sensational style, often dealing with the otherwise taboo subject of adultery. Although the Los Angeles County Bar Association tried (and failed) to get the State Bar to prohibit local lawyers from taking these parts-- tch, tch, the content of the shows could lower the dignity of the profession--but with lawyer-advertising illegal, this was an excellent way to get one's name out to potential clients. After the series ended in 1969, simulated trials did not reappear until *The People's Court* in 1981.

The 1980's version was immensely popular; it showed in 95% of the television market. The scenes were scripted and actors took the roles of the lawyers and other characters from real-life cases, but Judge William Keene made his own decisions. Previously Judge Keene served 23 years on the Los Angeles Superior Court bench, including seven months on Charles Manson's trial, until Manson filed an affidavit of prejudice and the trial was moved to a new judge. He was also the first California judge to allow his proceedings to be televised. The current version of this long running series is led by Mablean Ephriam, who began her legal career as a correctional officer at a federal prison, went on to become a legal secretary, graduated from Whittier College of Law, worked as Domestic Violence Coordinator for the city of Los Angeles, then went into a family law private practice. *Divorce Court* features real people and their disputes. Litigants are in the process of divorcing, preparing to file for divorce, or are legally separated. Ms. Ephriam rules on one aspect of their case — usually a property dispute — but does not grant a dissolution of the marriage. Both parties have signed a binding arbitration agreement making her TV ruling final. The official website is at http://www.divorcecourt.com/meet_mablean.htm.

Eye for an Eye (Atlas Worldwide Syndications and National Lampoon, Inc., 9/03-present)

A non-traditional spectacle of trial and punishment, the daily, half-hour, syndicated reality courtroom show breaks ground and takes small claims court to places unseen

since the Spanish Inquisition. Unlike any other courtroom television program, "Eye for an Eye" features Judge "Extreme" Akim (Anastopoulos) sentencing his litigants to "paybacks." The judge is a former state prosecutor from South Carolina. The bailiff is played by former boxing champ Sugar Ray Phillips and the current host is Kato Kaelin. Punishments have included allowing a car to be run over by a bulldozer, forcing an employer who taunted overweight employees to wear a fat suit, feeding worms to two people arguing over ownership of a bird, and making a wife abuser act as a punching dummy for a women's self-defense class.

Famous Jury Trials (DuMont, 10/49-3/52)

Re-enactments of real criminal trials began in a courtroom but then moved to another set to portray a flashback to the action being described. At the end, the case goes to the jury and then the audience gets to see what really happened. The prosecutor and defense attorney were both played by regulars, Jim Bender and Truman Smith. The series originated on radio, running from 1936-49. According to actor Frankie Thomas (also of *The Black Robe*): "This was based on an earlier radio show, and the format established on the radio show created frenzy on TV. Here was the reason. The show opened in a courtroom with someone testifying, and faded out to a flashback of the events covered in the testimony. But of course the flashback involved the same actor or actress seen in the initial courtroom scene, and the problem was that the different sets were in quite far apart in a large studio. The actors quickly became breathless running from set to set. Donald Woods was the narrator and I believe I did either the first or second show." (<http://www.slick-net.com/space/interviews/thomas.phtml>)

Final Appeal: From the Files of Unsolved Mysteries (NBC, 9/92-10/92)

Robert Stack hosted the series that, like *Court of Last Resort*, each week looked at the case of a convicted felon from both the prosecutor and defense sides, to determine whether or not it should be reopened. Viewers decided if the person was entitled to an appeal. "No system is perfect. Mistakes can happen." The show certainly did that with its first choice of criminals - Jeffrey MacDonald, 20 years earlier convicted of killing his wife and two children, who argued that a bunch of drug-crazed hippies had done the murders. This case was unfortunately paired with the story of 50 black sailors at Port Chicago, California, who were charged with mutiny in WWII after refusing to load ammunition under conditions that had already produced two explosions and killed 320 men. (A 1994 Navy review concluded that the men had been treated unfairly but that there were no grounds to overturn the verdicts.)

Guilty or Innocent (Syndicated, Genesis/Colbert, 1984)

A docudrama game show in which real trials are reenacted in 10-15 minutes and contestants can win \$10,000 if they reach the same verdict the real jury did. "King of Torts" Melvin Belli hosted the trial and John Shearin moderated the 10-minute deliberations. Some of the cases were Belli's own, while others were landmark cases such as *Dred Scott* or more sensational recent cases. The jurors who voted the same as the real jury divided \$5,000 among themselves, but if a correct unanimous vote was the result, they got \$10,000. Losing jurors were replaced in the next contest. Belli

claimed that he was doing the show because he "loved it" while at the same time saying his payment "was not enough."

Headlines on Trial (Syndicated, Orbis, 1987)

Arthur Miller led a round robin debate among various legal experts on hot topics of the day. Its intelligence perhaps contradicted audience expectations from the title because it did not last as long as his earlier *Miller's Court*.

Jones and Jury (9/94-5/95)

Star Jones, University of Houston Law Center grad, former Brooklyn assistant district attorney, and commentator for NBC and CourtTV, hosts a combination talk/court show. Small claims cases from courts in southern California are tried, but true audience participation sets this show apart from others like it. In this show, not only the judge (Jones) gets to question the litigants but so does the audience. After Jones gives them common sense jury instructions, they vote on a verdict. In the end, Jones decides who wins or loses in these legally binding decisions. The cases ran from a lightweight "your dog ate my pet bird" to to a serious credit card fraud among family members.

The Judge (Syndicated, Genesis/Colbert, 1986-92)

"The Judge" ran for a dozen years as a local show on WBNS in Cleveland, Ohio until it was picked up and syndicated by CBS. It centered on family court situations and involved children and adolescents in custody, paternity, delinquency and adoption hearings. Originally called *Custody Court*, it was based on real-life cases and in fact, was planned to show actual hearings. It was entirely scripted, even the decision, and usually had added melodramatic details. Judge Robert Franklin was played by actor Bob Shield.

Judge Alex (Syndicated, 9/2005-present)

Former police officer, attorney, and Florida Circuit Court Judge Alex E. Ferrer hosts "Judge Alex." Born in Cuba, Ferrer went to college and the University of Miami Law School while serving as a police officer. He practiced personal injury law for ten years and then was elected circuit court judge in the 11th district, working in the family and criminal courts. The show's cases are supplied by stringers who go from courthouse to courthouse across the country or from individuals who haven't actually brought a case in court but believe their injuries require adjudication. Ferrer's decision is binding and parties may not appeal or refile in another court. It was the top-rated new syndicated series of the season and was renewed after only a month on the air. It is produced by Twentieth Television.

Judge and Jury (MSNBC, 12/98-6/99)

The hourlong daily program featured "legal teams" debating the pros and cons of various civil and criminal cases, as well as broader legal issues. The "court" is run by former L. A. prosecutor-turned municipal and Superior Court Judge Burton Katz. No verdict was returned. During his 13 years in the D.A.'s office he worked on many high-profile criminal cases, including the Manson case. After serving on the bench, he turned to legal commentary for radio and television during the Simpson trial, and hosted

a syndicated radio talk show on local KABC. In 1997 Katz presided over a loose mock trial of the JonBenet Ramsey case in a two-episode segment of Geraldo Rivera's talk show.

Judge for Yourself (Syndicated, Buena Vista, 9/94-1/95)

This "court of public opinion" added the presence of celebrities as jury foremen/women. It was a daytime program that selected eight audience members to sit in a jury box and ponder such questions as "Older Women With Younger Men: Is He too Young for Her?" and "Sexless Marriages: Can They Work?" or "Is Lisa too overweight to make it as a singer?" After listening to the witnesses, the "jury" retires to a chamber. There, under the eye of the camera, they deliberate each case. Then they return to the show's host, Bill Handel, and deliver their non-binding "verdict." Viewers were also given a 900 telephone number to register their opinions. At times, personalities as Sally Kirkland, Charlene Tilton, Zsa Zsa Gabor, Mother Love and Jomarie Payton-Noble ("Family Matters") have taken a seat on the jury and then led the deliberation process. "Interracial Dating," "Celebrities vs. The Paparazzi" and "Men Who Won't Commit" have been matched to the celebrities. The premier week included a show on the O.J. Simpson case. After hearing evidence, speculation, and rumors from witnesses such as supermarket tabloid reporters, a woman who met Simpson while standing in line at a restaurant, and attorney Gloria Allred, the jury came back with a verdict of innocent. Handel is a Los Angeles lawyer who specializes in surrogate parenthood as well as being a regular talk show host.

Judge Greg Mathis, (Syndicated, Warner Bros., 9/99-present)

This is a one hour show featuring a former gang member turned Detroit district court judge. He was expelled from several schools and dropped out at 15. Later, at age 17, he was arrested for carrying a gun. Luckily, he landed in front of Wayne County Circuit Judge Charles Kaufman, now retired. Kaufman gave him a choice: Earn a GED or go to jail. He eventually entered Eastern Michigan University via an affirmative action program. After completing studies there, he graduated from the University of Detroit Law School in 1988. In 1994 he ran for a district court seat and won, but left the bench for a tv audience in 1999, although he is still commonly referred to as a 36th District judge. The cases on the show are often fraught with melodrama: a car payment is sought in a case that also involves a restraining order and paternity rights; a personal property case includes attorney fees, a restraining order and a lesbian chat room.

Judge Hatchett (Syndicated, Sony Television, 9/00-11/08)

Judge Hatchett delivers a diverse mix of family court, juvenile court and unusual small claims cases. Each case is explored in-depth, which often brings forth hidden, unpredictable angles that cut to the heart of the conflict. Yet what continues to distinguish the series from its genre are its trademark "intervention segments" creative sentences handed out by the Judge to help litigants understand the implications of their actions and learn how to better handle problems. These reality-check experiences are shot on-location around the country from the waters in New York's harbor to the streets of Los Angeles's inner city and offer guidance that can be blunt, confrontational, enriching or motivational. The cornerstone of the series is Judge Glenda Hatchett, who

has translated the innovative sentencing approach she developed during her years as head of one of the country's largest juvenile court systems. (from the website at <http://www.sonypictures.com/tv/shows/judgehatchett/about/index.php>) Sample cases: a woman's quest to resolve the paternity of her child – the two men in question are uncle and nephew; a woman who was attacked by her boyfriend's sister and almost had her finger bitten off; a woman who is accused of damaging her 68-year-old mother's computer after she found nude photos that her mother had taken of herself; a man who wants a DNA test to prove the paternity of an 11-year old child and the mother who claims he is motivated by his "psycho" girlfriend; a man suing a videographer who sent a pair of inexperienced teenagers to tape his son's bar mitzvah and then charged \$3,000 for a blurred, inaudible product; a woman whose son regularly beats up her and his classmates but who argues that his mother "starts it." The website promotes the educational value of the show, but clearly it aims for the sensational.

Judge Joe Brown (Syndicated, Paramount TV, 9/98-present)

The daily, half-hour, reality courtroom series presided over by former Shelby County (Memphis, Tennessee) Criminal Court Judge Joe Brown. An impactful, tough-talking, no-holds-barred jurist, Judge Joe brings his own sensibilities and unique empathies to the courtroom. Judge Brown served as a sitting judge of the Shelby County Criminal Courts in Memphis, Tennessee from 1990 until April 2000. As a criminal court judge, Judge Joe Brown developed a whole new way of sentencing first time, non-violent offenders -- and the results have been riveting. "I don't sentence anyone the conventional way if I can think of a better way to get their attention," says the man who, as a graduate of UCLA law school in 1973, moved to Tennessee and became the first African-American prosecutor in Memphis. "I had this case ... a guy broke into a woman's house and stole some valuables. Now I could've just given him jail time, but what would he learn? So I also decided to let the victim go over to his house so she could take something from him. The thief said, 'Judge, why are you letting her do this?' - and I said, 'Now you know how it feels.'" (from <http://www.paramount.com/television/judgejoebrown>) In one week's episodes, a father accuses an artist of tattooing his 17-year-old daughter without his consent, a mom claims a clown-for-hire delivered a shoddy performance at a birthday party, and Missouri parents sue their 19-year-old daughter for car payments. The show is second in the national ratings to *Judge Judy's* first place slot.

Judge Judy (Syndicated, Paramount Pictures, 9/96-present)

Judge Judy Sheindlin received her degrees from American University and New York Law School. She practiced law for 7 years and began her career on the bench in 1972 prosecuting juveniles. In 1982, New York Mayor Ed Koch appointed her to the Family Court. Her reputation for acerbic outspokenness led to an L.A. Times article in 1993, followed by a "60 Minutes" segment, an autobiography in 1996, and then her retirement from the bench and the television show. Her "you are an idiot" approach is hugely popular. Her cases (all civil) are perhaps a little less "Springer"-like than others: a North Carolina man accuses his ex of forging his signature; she claims he broke her finger; a street musician, fighting for custody of his kids, is publicly accused of smoking pot; a gambler denies being overpaid by \$9,000 on his winning tickets at a Los Angeles

racetrack; a St. Louis woman pours a soda on the head of a late-arriving, loud-talking moviegoer; rock-throwing incident between two children leaves Missouri mothers feuding over a broken car window. With the show's number one rating, the producers can pick and choose cases from across the country and potential litigants are invited to submit their cases at the official website. After a 10-15 minute hearing, the judge hands down her legally-binding verdict. The official site is at <http://www.judgejudy.com/home/home.asp>.

Judge Mills Lane (Syndicated, 9/98-2001)

A real-life Nevada District Court Judge for more than eight years and a professional boxing referee with more than 100 championship fights under his belt, Lane was supremely qualified to step into his TV role when the series premiered in August 1998. Born into a wealthy Georgia banking family, Mills defied expectations by joining the Marine Corps in 1956. There, he learned the importance of discipline and the finer points of boxing, rising to become a welterweight champion. After his military tenure, Lane attended schools in South Carolina and the University of Nevada-Reno. His distinguished boxing career included the 1960 NCAA Welterweight title and an amateur record of 60 wins and 4 losses. In his last two years at Nevada-Reno, he boxed professionally to help with his tuition costs, going 11-1. Lane graduated from the University of Utah's College of Law in 1970 and passed the Nevada bar exam before going to work for the Washoe County Mills Lane rose steadily through the legal system, eventually becoming a District Judge in Reno. He stepped down from this position on April 30, 1998, and stepped up to a new bench in his own courtroom series. Lane collaborated with J. Edwin Smith on his book, *Let's Get It On*, which examines his experiences in both the ring and the courtroom. (from <http://www.judgemillslane.com/Home/logo.htm>) These are small claims cases, eg. a boyfriend who smashes up his girlfriend's apartment, a roommate claiming assault, sale of a defective parrot, who has right of way on a sand dune. Mills is not so acerbic as other tv judges, but does freely interject his opinion on the parties' actions and sometimes has pusillanimous litigants hauled off by the bailiff.

Judge Wapner's Animal Court (Syndicated, 9/98-12/01?)

Have you or a family member ever been bitten by a dog? Has your pet ever been accused of property damage? Of fathering unwanted offspring? Of harassment? Then you would empathize with the litigants in Judge Wapner's Animal Court, where cases range from personal injury to paternity, from malpractice to emotional distress, and from negligence to rightful custody. The litigants are real people, with real wrongs to be righted. Instead of pursuing their case in small claims court, which can be time-consuming and costly, participants have agreed to argue their case before Judge Wapner, whose decisions are binding on the parties. Using California statutes as his guide, Judge Wapner can make awards as high as \$5,000. More important than any monetary compensation, however, is principle, as people fight to protect their beloved pets from physical harm or baseless accusations. (from the official website at <http://animal.discovery.com/animalpages/wapner/wapner.html>)

Kids Court (Nickelodeon, 9/88-1/94)

In a case of real audience participation, legal "cases" of interest to kids - who must pay for a broken walkman?, are phone calls private? what's the punishment for bullying? - are presented for judgment. The plaintiffs and defendants are picked from the 8-13 year-old audience, given about 15 minutes to review the particulars of their character and the facts of their case, and then it's up to them to present the most convincing case. The presiding judge is the Hon. Judge O. Meter, an applause meter in the shape of a wigged jurist. Whichever side, after the jury cheers its approval, has the better reading on the barometer is the victor. Like any complex legal dispute, some cases require expert witnesses. Ali Chiu, an eighth-grader who played the plaintiff in a case of age discrimination on a high school debate team, had the expert assistance of the youngest lawyer in America, 19-year-old Steve Baccus of Miami. The show was interspersed with "Gavel Busters," judicial trivia questions such as, "What is a capital offense?" and "You Be the Judge," segments that pose real-life legal scenarios and their resolutions. The adult moderator is tv actor, Paul Provenza.

The Law Firm (NBC, 7/05-11/05)

Real lawyers. Real cases. Real consequences. Executive producer David E. Kelley once again brings legal drama to television, this time in a reality tv format. Trial attorney and legal analyst Roy Black manages 12 actual lawyers competing against each other while trying real court cases with judges and juries, resulting in outcomes that will be final, legal and binding. Each week, one legal eagle is eliminated until only one remains. Cases range from First Amendment issues to neighbor disputes to wrongful death. Distinguished judges decide some of the cases, while a jury determines the others. In the end, the top attorney will win a prize of \$250,000. (from the website at http://www.nbc.com/The_Law_Firm/) In the actual end of the series, it was cut loose from NBC after two episodes. It moved to Bravo where they also picked up the remaining six episodes, running Sept.-Nov. 2005.

Lie Detector (Syndicated, Sandy Frank Production, 9/82-8/83)

F. Lee Bailey hosted the show in which three individuals would undergo a polygraph, under the supervision of expert (and series creator) Ed Gelb. Zsa Zsa Gabor was scheduled for the pilot, but when asked whether she married for money, "irregularities" in her chart caused the segment to be replaced by that of a man who pled guilty to a murder charge just before the jury handed down a "not guilty" verdict. Following former Alabama state Sen. Robert Glass's indictment by a federal grand jury on charges stemming from a kickback scheme, Glass went on the show, passed the test and had videotapes of his performance distributed to TV stations back home. Caril Ann Fugate's test proved she was an unwilling accomplice to Charles Starkweather in a 1958 murder spree in which 10 people were killed in Nebraska and Wyoming. Oddly, Gelb and Bailey were able to examine the graphs and determine whether the guest was lying in just the space of a commercial break.

Miller's Court (Local, Boston, WCVB, then sold to PBS - 9/82-12/85)

Harvard law professor Arthur Miller hosted this locally-produced show during which he took an audience through a Socratic dialogue and a mock trial on a controversial legal

topic -- school prayer, abortion, gun control. He also introduced guest specialists who usually had opposing opinions on the subject. It started as a local show on Boston's WCVB and after two seasons the show was picked up by PBS and shown nationally.

Morning Court (ABC, 10/60-5/61)

Thanks to the huge success of ABC's *Day in Court* and *Accused*, William Gwinn took on the role as the daily judge on a weekday show in the mid-morning hours. Many of these shows had a regular bailiff and court reporter but this one also included a daily alternating jurist, Los Angeles school board member Georgianna Hardy. Her credential were that she was the wife of attorney Jack W. Hardy and a former reviewer on KNXT, Channel 2's "Cavalcade of Books." Realizing the audience was stay-at-home mothers, the cases were primarily domestic.

Moral Court (Syndicated, 9/2000-9/01)

Moral Court is an exciting new television show that's different from any other program on the air. Moral Court isn't a court of law, but a court of ethics. It's where the accused faces the accuser before our Moral Judge, Larry Elder. And whoever is judged right can be awarded up to \$2,000! On Moral Court, it pays to be right! (from the official website). Elder is a lawyer turned radio show host on KABC, who took over the program after colleague Dennis Prager failed to test well. Examples of cases: "There is No Santa Claus" A mother wants to tell her child that there is a Santa Claus, but daddy says that's lying; "Naked Neighbor Sunbather" A man objects to naked sunbathing by the woman next door; "Music Man Wears a Skirt" A woman backs out of a deal to work with a rock star because he wears a dress. It promises drama, emotion and the excitement of a game show. Feminist lawyer Gloria Allred took over the radio version of the program.

Night Court U.S.A. (KTLA, Syndicated, Banner Films, 1958)

Cast: Jay Jostyn, Henry Scott

Summary: Judge Jay Jostyn, attended by his bailiff Henry Scott, hears cases in a Los Angeles night court. The announcer introduces the show as "real cases and real people," but although these may be real cases, actors are taking on all the roles. The cases are a mishmash - the first episode includes a girl arrested for indecent exposure while wearing a bikini, a man fined for violation of the "smoke laws" (air pollution), a woman arrested for hitting her husband with a pot because he clicks his teeth, and a former war hero charged with narcotics use and addiction. Jostyn was also D.A. Paul Garrett in the tv series *Mr. District Attorney* and had an uncredited role as a D.A. in *Kiss of Death*. See the first episode at <http://www.liketelevision.com/web1/classictv/ncourt/>. The show began as a local production of L.A. station KTLA, then went in to syndication.

On Trial (ABC, 11/48-8/52)

Public affairs issues were brought to public attention in a courtroom format. A real-life judge presided over the arguments of counsel and expert witnesses' testimony on controversial issues. The first episode debated the prohibition of wire-tapping.

On Trial (Syndicated, 9/88-5/89)

Nick Clooney, former tv newsman, was the host of this precursor to CourtTv, a show that sat in on real trials in courtrooms that allow cameras. Clooney adds commentary and explains legal terminology to the edited trial segments. He is also joined by an attorney who consults to the show. Wierd truth beats out David Kelley's imagination - the pilot episode was a love triangle murder in Alaska; the defense attorney's name was Venable Vermont, the judge's Seaborn Buckalew and it was the prosecutor's first case. The first words of her opening statement were: "you know and I know that there are some women that men [***] and some that men marry."

Parole (Syndicated, Telestar, 1959)

Cuts from real parole hearings in various prisons were offered in 15 or 30-minute segments as syndication "filler."

People's Court (Syndicated, Edwards/Billett, 1981-present)

"The People's Court" draws on ordinary people who have filed grievances in civil court and have opted to have their cases heard and mediated by the judge. An experienced team of researchers continually canvasses courts across the country, with an emphasis on East Coast cities and towns, in search of the most compelling, unique and thought-provoking cases. Cases run the gamut from disputes between neighbors, family members and intimates, to dissatisfied customers suing businesses. The judge's decisions, based on current law, are final and binding. (from the official website at <http://peoplescourt.warnerbros.com/>)

When Joseph Wapner ran the court the litigants were people who had filed small-claims actions in Los Angeles County. They were interviewed by the production staff and agreed to transfer their cases to the show and be bound by Mr. Wapner's decision. This was the first time actual litigants agreed to take their cases to a television court and accept an on-the-spot judgment. Fifteen hundred dollars was set aside by the production company to pay the claim in the event the plaintiff won. If the award was lower than \$1,500, the remainder was split between the two parties, who also shared the money should Mr. Wapner rule in favor of the defendant. When Wapner agreed to join the show, he was retired and willing to give time and energy to its success. At the same time reality shows were once again hugely popular (*Real People, That's Incredible, Those Amazing Animals*). The series was a guaranteed hit but no one knew how much it would influence television for the next decades. Wapner ran a tight courtroom: he required that litigants be prepared to argue their cases and he followed strict rules of evidence. Although the cases seemed to be rushed to fit the half-hour, they were actually edited for the time slot. The judges were Joseph Wapner, 9/81-93; Ed Koch (9/97-6/99), Gerald Sheindlin, (9/99-1/01), Marilyn Milian, (1/01-present). "Don't take the law into your own hands...take 'em to court."

Marilyn Milian was born in Queens, New York to Cuban parents. After attaining a cum laude degree from Georgetown Law School, she was hired by Janet Reno to work as an Assistant State Attorney for the Dade County State Attorney's Office. In 1999, Florida governor Jeb Bush appointed her to the Miami Circuit Court. In 2001, she was hired to replace Jerry Sheindlin as judge of The People's Court. She is married to Circuit Court Judge John Schlesinger.

People's Court of Small Claims (Syndicated, ABC Films, 1958)

This short-lived precursor to the Judge Wapner series, and commonly known as *People's Court*, was presided over by Orrin B. Evans, a professor and later dean of the USC Law Center 1963-68. He presided over 3 small claims cases per half hour in his straight-laced and quiet style. The actors were given the framework of a plot which was loosely based on a real case, and then improvised. His own son appeared as a plaintiff, suing over defects in an ant farm (a popular toy/science experiment at the time). His wife and daughter also sometimes appeared. Although short-lived the show was very popular, outrating the hugely successful *Wagon Train* in the same time slot in some areas. Evans' father was a Seventh Circuit judge, and both of his sons are members of the California bar. Although admitted in several other states, Evans was not a member of the California bar, an advantage in light of the ban against lawyer-advertising at the time.

Politics on Trial (ABC, 9/52-10/52)

The politics of the Democrat and Republican parties were presented in a trial format, with a prominent members of the party presenting different issues, followed by the other party's "opposing counsel" and then a defense. A real judge presided. The series was meant to educate the voters in the upcoming presidential election.

Power of Attorney (Fox, 9/00-12/01)

Former New Jersey Superior Court Judge Andrew Napolitano presides over a small claims court which gives everyday people representation by "name" attorneys such as Christopher Darden, Ed Masry, Geoffrey Feiger or Gloria Allred. As the title shows, the emphasis in this show is on the defense attorney, not the judge's personality. In the second case, Jeffrey Feiger (Louise Woodward, Jack Kevorkian) represents a boy whose father promised him \$10 for each A on his report card. The boy is suing for \$165. Coincidentally, the father had just recently amended his petition for additional custody. Feiger says in his closing: "The law's purpose, if any, is to protect the vulnerable, the weak, children. This case cries out for justice." When Napolitano was named Fox's senior judicial analyst, he stepped down from the show and Cleveland Municipal Judge Lynn Toler took over the second season. Ratings dived and it was canceled midway in its second season

The Prosecutors: In Pursuit of Justice (Discovery, 9/00-12/01?)

A combination of trial recreation and interviews with the principals told from the prosecutors' point of view. The first regular segment told the story of Austin's own Kenneth McDuff, a man convicted for murder, sentenced to death, paroled, and then arrested and convicted for several other murders, and finally executed in 1998. The 13-part series was done by the same group, New Dominion Pictures, that did Discovery's highest rated series, *The New Detectives* and *The FBI Files*.

Science Court (ABC, 9/97-9/00)

"Where science is law, and scientific thinking rules." An animated show that mixed courtroom drama, scientific experiments, and humor to teach fundamental concepts like the water cycle, gravity, flight, and energy. The pilot episode deals with the water cycle.

The opening scene shows a man on a subway platform who slips on a puddle of water. Noticing the water dripping from the ceiling, he sues the pipemaker, claiming the leak caused him to fall. In court, where Judge Stone (Paula Poundstone) presides, expert witnesses and courtroom demonstrations show such concepts as condensation and evaporation. Along with court stenographer Fred (Fred Stoller), who is hard of hearing (thus the need to repeat concepts), and a science reporter, Jen Betters (Jennifer Shulman) who serves as the audience's courtroom commentator, the regulars are lawyers Doug Savage (Bill Braudis), who argues for the plaintiff and never wins and attorney Allison Krempel (Paula Plum). She always has her facts straight because she is advised by science teacher Prof. Parsons (H. Jon Benjamin). As for using a courtroom setting, Snyder explained that the idea came from the televised O.J. Simpson trial where children and adults learned more about how the nation's public justice system works than from any civics course in school. In 1998, the name was changed to "Squigglevision" and a math and vocabulary game added to the courtroom segment.

State v. (ABC, 6/19/02-7/17/02)

A special order from the Arizona Supreme Court gave *State v.* total access to a series of homicide cases in Maricopa County (which includes the city of Phoenix). For each case, ABC News' cameras followed the preparation by both sides, even private conversations between defense lawyers and clients. Since each segment allowed only one hour per case, it included only selected takes from the trials. Cameras were actually allowed inside the jury room to record deliberations in a first time event, although several days is edited down to only a few minutes. Perhaps one of the most telling things about this series was the depiction of how jurors think. When a defendant claimed self-defense in a homicide the jurors reaction to her was: Juror #1: "She is obviously a consummate liar. A consummate liar." Unidentified Juror #2: "Oh, yeah." Foreperson: "Yeah." Offscreen Voice #3: "And you know what? Lesbians..." In a manslaughter/dwi case a juror offered that "everybody's been driving while drunk some time." Cynthia McFadden narrated the series.

Style Court (Entertainment Television, 8/03-1/04)

The Style Network, sister network to E TV produces "Style Court," on which people haul their friends, neighbors and co-workers into court before style expert Judge Henry Roth. They will be tried for alleged crimes of fashion, trend misdemeanors and other style infractions. The judge hears the evidence, consults the jury, and hands down a verdict of guilty (makeover) or not guilty (no makeover). The series features Doug Llewelyn, former host of "The People's Court," as commentator. Australian wedding dress designer, author, part-time DJ "Phat Waxy," and lawyer Henry Roth hear the plaintiff's complaint and defendant's defense of his/her clothing choice and then decides if there is need for bailiff and Icelandic model Berglind Ivey to carry off the guilty party in a pair of rhinestone handcuffs. An hour later the audience gets to see the newly transformed result.

Superior Court (Syndicated, Edwards/Billett, 9/86-90)

The show presented re-creations of actual civil and criminal trials in Los Angeles Superior Court. The pilot episode dealt with a woman who sued a real estate agent for

not telling her that the previous owner of the house she wanted to buy had died of AIDS. Initially, it starred a real judge (William E. Burns) and lawyers, although not those who had worked on the original cases. In February 1987, in celebration of the bicentennial of the Constitution, the show featured celebrity judges, such as recently ousted California Supreme Court Justice Rose Bird. U.S. Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun concluded the show with a few words on the Constitution. Beginning in 1988, actor Raymond St. Jacques played Judge Clayton Thomas and lawyers, litigants and court watchers were also played by actors. Dialogue tended toward a soapy style thanks to its producers and headwriters, a husband-wife team. They were Joyce and Bill Corrington, a former English professor and lawyer who wrote serious fiction about lawyers and judges (*All My Trials*, *The Southern Reporter*), as well as screenplays (*Battle for the Planet of the Apes*), and soap operas (*General Hospital*, *Search for Tomorrow*).

Texas Justice (Syndicated, Fox, 3/01-5/05)

Larry Joe Doherty, senior partner with Houston's Doherty & Wagner, hosts the show which features a cross-section of relationship and general dispute cases from the Southern and Southwestern regions of the country. The litigants are culled from j.p. dockets; any damages awarded to either party comes from Fox.

They Stand Accused (DuMont, 4/48-52, 9/54-12/54)

Fictional cases were tried before a jury made up of studio audience members. It was broadcast live from Chicago's Dumont affiliate WGN, with local attorney Charles Johnston acting as the judge and actors taking the parts of defendants and witnesses. Originally titled *Cross Question*, the show was written by William Wines, an Illinois assistant attorney general. It appeared as a local show in the first season of primetime network television, got picked up by CBS, and in January 1949 began broadcasting to stations east of Chicago. It switched to Dumont and was renamed *They Stand Accused* in 1950.

Traffic Court (KABC, 6/57-58; ABC, 6/58-3/59)

Traffic court cases were reenacted in this primetime series, which began in June 1957 as a local Los Angeles (KABC) public service program meant to encourage safe driving. The judge was played first by then-Municipal Court Judge Evelle Younger (later L.A. County D.A., state Attorney General, and unsuccessful Republican candidate for governor). The real cases were unscripted but had a rough walk-through before showing live. When the Southern California Chevy dealers association decided to sponsor the show, it lost its public service status and Younger submitted a request for a judicial ethics opinion. The response was not favorable and he resigned. He had also earlier hosted another local program, *Armchair Detective*, in the days before commercial television sponsorship. When ABC syndicated the show, the new judge was Edgar Allan Jones Jr., a UCLA law professor who played the judge on the the concurrent programs *Day in Court* and *Accused*. Episodes were taped on weekends and nights to accomodate Jones' teaching schedule (as they were for ABC's other judge/professor Orrin Evans). One episode starred Dodgers pitcher Sandy Koufax, who had been ticketed for stopping his car after it had been hit by a Little League ball and throwing it

back to the players. In addition to teaching and "playing" judge, Jones had other interests - he had 11 children, 4 of whom became lawyers - and did labor arbitration on the side. Jones commented on the interest in the reality courtroom shows in 1958: "We're involved in a court cycle, and I'm confident it will last as long as the westerns, maybe longer." He was right.

There were also other local versions of the show. In Columbus, Ohio, station WBNS used actual cases from Franklin County Municipal Court. It was presented live and many audience members believed they were watching the real court in action. Although actors played the parts of the defendants, prosecutors and police played their real life roles until the Columbus Bar Association forbade its members from appearing on tv. KABC-TV's sister radio station was the first on the west coast, going on the air on April 14, 1925 as KVFV. On November 15, 1929 the station was sold to Earl C. Anthony, a local car dealer looking for a new medium to advertise in. He changed the call letters to reflect his initials, KECA. ABC bought the station in 1944, adopting the station's present name and on Sept. 16, 1949 KABC-TV went on the air.

Trial by Jury (Syndicated, 9/89-90)

Cast: Raymond Burr, Joseph Campanella, Madlyn Rhue, Charles Siebert

Summary: Daily daytime serial, somewhat based on actual cases, hosted by Raymond Burr, as retired Judge Gordon Duane who provides commentary both on the facts and points of law. Joseph Campanella took the part of the prosecuting attorney, Charles Siebert acted as the defense, and Madlyn Rhue was the judge

Trialwatch (NBC, 1/91-7/91)

Promising "Real People, Real Trials!," Entertainment Tonight reporter Robb Weller and lawyer Lisa Specht co-host the show, which tells the story of real criminal cases by interviewing lawyers, witnesses, prosecutors and cops. The first show included a "Fatal Attraction" case in which a woman was convicted of killing the boyfriend who dumped her, a custody battle in which a man threatened to divorce his wife unless she had an abortion but then sued for child custody, and one in which a New Jersey court clerk married a policeman and was fired because local law prohibited the court clerk from marriage to a law officer.

Verdict (CBS, 6/91-9/91)

"You are about to witness an actual criminal trial. There are no actors, no scripts, no re-enactments. Every second is real." On the same day that federal courts began an experiment on the effects of cameras in the courtroom, the network CourtTv was launched. But also, that same day, the general public had much more access to trials in a limited run series that followed one criminal trial per episode, from start to finish, editing it all to 22 minutes. *Verdict* included background information provided by a CBS correspondent (a different one each week), clips from the trial, and a reading of the verdict, as well as comments from the attorneys from both sides which had been taped during the trial, but not seen until air time. Cases included a boy who had accidentally shot his best friend, an adopted son who had murdered his parents, a rapist who blindfolded the woman he raped, and a con artist who had killed the woman he swindled, and a psychiatrist who tried to bribe a cop to plant drugs on his girlfriend's

brother-in-law. The network wrote in their press release: "With many courtrooms now open to cameras, "Verdict" is able to provide a far more realistic picture of what actually happens in courtrooms than do "L.A. Law," "Perry Mason," "Matlock" or other courtroom TV dramas. While entertaining, these shows are fiction and often misrepresent what lawyers do and how the legal system works."

The Verdict is Yours (CBS, 9/57-9/62)

Running primarily as a daytime show (prime-time only in the summer of 1958), the series was original in that it was not scripted. Outlines of the fictional trials were given to the actor-litigants and -witnesses and real-life attorneys (the judges were also played by attorneys). The jury was picked from the audience. Jim McKay, who was best known as the host of ABC's *Wide World of Sports*, was the show's first "court reporter," providing the audience with commentary on legal proceedings. It began a year before *Day in Court* and *People's Court of Small Claims*, which both adopted its style of improvised scripts. It had "stolen" the concept of audience members as jurors from *They Stand Accused*.

The Witness (CBS, 9/60-1/61)

Although not exactly a trial, the series depicted Congressional hearings on well-known gangsters or fictional criminals. Each episode was set in a Congressional hearing room, as members of the committee (played by members of the New York Bar) and its chairman (Paul McGrath) grilled characters such as Lucky Luciano (Telly Savalas in the premier), Ma Barker, Dutch Schulz, or Al Capone.

Your Witness (ABC, 10/49-9/50)

Edmund Lowe, son of a California judge, hosted dramatizations of actual cases in this low budget series coming from the "[*Chicago School*](#)." In the summer of 1950, it followed *On Trial* and ran opposite Dumont's *Famous Jury Trials*. It was nominated in the category for best live show in the second Emmy awards.