

ACLU themes in movies

(most synopses taken from moviesunlimited.com)

Free Speech:

- **“Inherit the Wind”** – (1960) Explosive courtroom drama, based on the famed Scopes "Monkey Trial" of the '20s that pitted Creationists against Evolutionists and Clarence Darrow against William Jennings Bryan. The magnificent cast, directed by Stanley Kramer, includes Spencer Tracy, Fredric March, Gene Kelly, Dick York, Donna Anderson and Claude Akins.
- **“The People vs. Larry Flynt”** – 1996 movie about porn king Larry Flynt’s battles against censorship, in which a young ACLU attorney (played by Edward Norton) defends Flynt’s First Amendment right to publish offensive material.

Synopsis: Milos Forman expertly directs the viewer's sympathy toward Larry Flynt (Woody Harrelson in a superb performance): smut peddler, misogynist, and Editor in Chief of the infamous Hustler magazine. Born in the back woods of Appalachia, the young Flynt--in an opening scene that immediately grabs and amuses--is seen selling moonshine as a child to alcoholic hermits. Flash forward to the 1960s, and he's running a go-go club where he meets the wild (and strangely loveable) Althea Leasure (Courtney Love) who becomes his soul mate and wife. Life is not as sweet as it first seems for the porn king who finds a massive readership for his magazine (the first to show crotch shots). He soon finds himself in the middle of several Supreme Court law suits, and also as an assassin's target. While Flynt's various outrageous meetings with self-righteous Reverend Jerry Falwell (Richard Paul) and devout Christian Ruth Carter Stapleton (President Jimmy Carter's sister, played by Rudolph Giuliani's ex-wife Donna Hanover) are hilarious and smartly pointed, it is perhaps the touching, and ultimately tragic, love story between him and Althea that make him very human, and very interesting to watch.

- **“Dirty Pictures”** – (2000). Synopsis: The events surrounding the 1990 obscenity trial of Cincinnati museum curator Dennis Barrie, who launched a nationwide controversy when his arts center exhibited sexually graphic photography of Robert Mapplethorpe, are brought to life in this compelling docudrama. James Woods stars as Barrie, whose prosecution came to symbolize the fight for freedom of expression. Craig T. Nelson, Diana Scarwid also star.
- **“Mark Twain: A Film Directed by Ken Burns”** – PBS documentary aired January 14-15, 2002. Recommended for this list because it addresses themes like racism and censorship (book banning).
- **Made-for-tv movie about Skokie** (not sure of the title).
- **"This is What Democracy Looks Like"** which is about the Seattle WTO protests

- **“PCU”** -- (1994). Synopsis: Outrageous comedy ensues when freshman Tom Lawrence tries to fit in at Port Chester University, a college boasting an array of sensitive special interest groups. While walking the tightrope between Republicans, the anti-meat brigade and "Womynists," Tom decides to hang out with a frat known for their partying abilities. Jeremy Piven, Chris Young and David Spade star.
- **“Bulworth”** – 1998 slam on political correctness. Great for free speech, but not exactly on ACLU’s side in the campaign finance debate.
Synopsis: Is the American public ready for a politician who tells the truth? In the final days of his re-election campaign, burned-out U.S. senator Warren Beatty takes out a contract on his own life and, with nothing to lose, begins speaking candidly about race relations, corruption and media politics to his astonished constituents. Halle Berry, Oliver Platt and Don Cheadle co-star in this biting sharp satire directed and co-scripted by Beatty.
- **“Fahrenheit 451”** – 1967 classic on book banning. Synopsis: Francois Truffaut's only English-language film, his stark and gripping adaptation of Ray Bradbury's famed novel stars Oskar Werner as a book-burning "fireman" in a future society where all books and reading materials are banned. Julie Christie plays a dual role as Werner's wife and a bibliophile who opens his mind to the forbidden world of literature.

Freedom of Association:

- **“The Front”** – 1976 movie starring Woody Allen and Zero Mostel, about the McCarthy Era. Synopsis: In a rare "acting only" turn, Woody Allen plays a hack writer who serves as a "front" for blacklisted TV scripters during the McCarthy era of the mid-'50s. Martin Ritt's acerbic comedic look at the "witch hunts" is taken from personal experiences.
- **“The Majestic”** – (2001) Synopsis: In this Capra-esque drama set during the 1950's blacklist, a young, ambitious Hollywood screenwriter (Jim Carrey) loses his job and his identity, only to find new courage, love and the power of conviction in the heart of a small town's life.
- **“Guilty by Suspicion”** – (1991) Synopsis: Powerful study of the Hollywood blacklist of the 1950s starring Robert De Niro as a successful director who is given a choice by the House Un-American Activities Committee: name names of colleagues who are "Reds" or remain silent and risk his career. Annette Bening, George Wendt and Patricia Wettig also star in this compelling drama.

- **“The Manchurian Candidate”** – 1962 classic about right-winger who calls someone a Communist; the accused man sues, wins, and donates award money to ACLU.
Synopsis: One of the finest political thrillers ever made. John Frankenheimer's blend of Cold War paranoia and sly satire stars Laurence Harvey as a Korean War "hero" who has been brainwashed by the Soviets. Frank Sinatra is the war buddy who learns of the plot and must stop him; with Angela Lansbury, Janet Leigh, James Gregory, Henry Silva.

Religious Freedom / Social Tolerance:

- **“The Crucible”** – Unlike the original 1957 version, the 1996 version is in English.
Synopsis of 1996 adaptation: Arthur Miller wrote the screenplay for director Nicholas Hytner's acclaimed adaptation of his allegorical drama set during the Salem Witch Trials in 17th-century Massachusetts. A young girl's spurning by her married lover leads to accusations of witchcraft, and soon an entire village is gripped in a fever of hysteria, bigotry and fear. Daniel Day-Lewis, Winona Ryder, Joan Allen and Paul Scofield star.
- **“Chocolat”** – 2000 Oscar-nominated film about intolerance in a small, conservative village.
Synopsis: Bittersweet tale from director Lasse Hallstrom is set in a small French village in 1959, where single mother Juliette Binoche arrives with daughter Victoire Thivisol and opens a chocolate shop. Soon, unhappy and repressed townsfolk like dour widow Judi Dench and abused wife Lena Olin are reinvigorated by Binoche's confections, but when iron-willed mayor Alfred Molina sees a radical change in his citizens' attitude, he tries to shut down the shop. With Carrie-Anne Moss, Hugh O'Conor, and Johnny Depp as an Irish river Gypsy seduced by Binoche's sweet spell.
- **“The Handmaid’s Tale”** -- (1990) Synopsis: Eerie translation of Margaret Atwood's novel about a future America where right-wing fundamentalists rule the roost and women are subservient to men. One woman risks her life by rebelling against the people who see her only as a baby-maker and have taken her newborn child. Natasha Richardson, Faye Dunaway, Robert Duvall star. Adapted by Harold Pinter and directed by Volker Schlöndorff.
- **“Pleasantville”** – (1998). Synopsis: A mysterious remote control zaps contemporary teens Tobey Maguire and Reese Witherspoon into the black-and-white suburban landscape of Maguire's favorite '50s sitcom, "Pleasantville," where their '90s attitudes inspire, agitate, and (literally) put color in the cheeks of the town's befuddledly wholesome citizens. Jeff Daniels, Joan Allen, William H. Macy and Don Knotts also star in this inventive social comedy from "Big" scripter Gary Ross.

- **“Of Mice and Men”** – (1992). Synopsis: A powerful, majestically acted version of John Steinbeck's classic about the relationship between the strong but feeble-minded Lennie (John Malkovich) and his protector, George (Gary Sinise), migrant laborers who toil in the California fields during the Depression. Ray Walston, Sherilyn Fenn and Casey Siemaszko also star; Sinise also directed from Horton Foote's script.

Constitutional Democracy / Freedom:

- **“Seven Days in May”** – (1964) Synopsis: Sensational political thriller about a noble but weak president (Fredric March) whose nuclear disarmament treaty with the Soviets motivates a right-wing general (Burt Lancaster) to plot to overthrow the government. Kirk Douglas plays Lancaster's assistant, who accidentally learns of the coup and must stop it. With Ava Gardner, Edmond O'Brien. John Frankenheimer directs Rod Serling's script.
- **“The Patriot”** – (2000). Synopsis: Mel Gibson is Benjamin Martin, the legendary "Hero of Fort Wilderness" who has left military life to raise his family on his South Carolina farm in 1776. But after a British commander torches his home and kills one of his sons, Gibson joins with oldest son Heath Ledger to lead a ragtag militia against the Redcoats. This stirring, action-packed epic from, appropriately, "Independence Day" director Roland Emmerich also stars Chris Cooper, Joely Richardson and Jason Isaacs.
- **“Braveheart”** – (1995). Synopsis: Director/star Mel Gibson took home Best Picture and Best Director Academy Awards for this historical epic about 13th-century Scottish hero William Wallace, a farmer forced into fighting the forces of England's King Edward I after they kill his father and new wife. Highlighted by amazing battle scenes, the passionate saga also stars Patrick McGoohan, Sophie Marceau and Catherine McCormick.

Due Process:

- **“Absence of Malice”** – (1981). Synopsis: Timely, powerful drama questions the power of the contemporary press. A businessman unknowingly becomes the subject of a criminal investigation thanks to a story written by a feisty reporter. Fine acting by Paul Newman, Sally Field, Melinda Dillon.
- **“Waco: The Rules of Engagement”** -- (1997). Synopsis: Nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary, this controversial feature chronicles the 1993 standoff in Waco, Texas, between the Branch Davidian cultists led by David Koresh and federal agents from the FBI and ATF. Director William Gazecki uses interviews and footage from congressional hearings and newsreels to examine the events that led to more than 80 deaths.

- **“The Siege At Ruby Ridge”** – (1996). Synopsis: This docudrama chronicles the 1992 raid by federal agents on white supremacist and anti-government zealot Randy Weaver's remote Idaho home, which led to an 11-day standoff that ended in deaths on both sides. Based on reporter Jess Walter's book "Every Knee Shall Bow," the film stars Randy Quaid, Laura Dern, Darren Burrows and Kirsten Dunst. AKA: "Ruby Ridge: An American Tragedy."
- **“The Oxbow Incident”** – (1943). Synopsis: Taking place in 1885 Nevada, THE OX-BOW INCIDENT is the harrowing story of two cowboys, Gil Carter (Henry Fonda) and Art Croft (Harry Morgan), who believe in justice and honor and attempt to quell a lynch mob's thirst for revenge when they believe that a cattleman has been murdered by rustlers. Based tightly on the best-selling book by Walter Van Tilburg Clark and directed by William Wellman, THE OX-BOW INCIDENT is an unforgettable film; don't miss the powerful scene in which Anthony Quinn performs surgery on himself--it is an amazing moment in a brilliant film that received a well-deserved Academy Award nomination for Best Picture.

Racism:

- **“Mr. And Mrs. Loving”** – 1968 movie starring Timothy Hutton and Lela Rochon as the interracial couple whose fight against Virginia's anti-miscegenation law led the US Supreme Court to rule that states cannot ban interracial marriage. (*Loving v. Virginia* was an ACLU case.)
Synopsis: Based on a true story, this telefilm takes place in 1960, when 17 states enforced laws that prohibited inter-racial marriages. But when white Virginian Richard Loving impregnates his black girlfriend Mildred, he decides to marry her, for neither believes that the law will be enforced. Unfortunately they're wrong, and the pair is arrested and jailed on their wedding night. The judge offers them a choice: either spend three years in prison, or leave Virginia for 25 years. The Lovings choose the latter, and head for segregated Washington, D.C., where Mildred writes a letter about the unfair law to attorney general Robert Kennedy. As a result, the couple's case is picked up by a young ACLU lawyer -- and decided upon by the Supreme Court.
- **“Mississippi Burning”** – (1964) Synopsis: Controversy and acclaim surrounded Alan Parker's fact-based look at the turbulent American South of the early '60s. The murder of three civil rights workers in a small Mississippi town brings disparate FBI agents Gene Hackman and Willem Dafoe to investigate, but the bigotry-spawned violence continues. Frances McDormand, Brad Dourif also star.
- **"New World Border"** about the threat to human rights posed by US border policies.

- **“To Kill A Mockingbird”** – 1962 Oscar-nominated adaptation of novel by Harper Lee. Synopsis: Released in the early 60s, the timely film reflected the state of deep racial problems and social injustice that existed in the South. The film begins by portraying the innocence and world of play of a tomboyish six year-old girl and her ten year-old brother, and their perceptions of their attorney father. They are abruptly brought out of their insulated and carefree world by his unpopular but courageous defense of a black man falsely accused of raping a Southern white woman. Although racism dooms the accused man, a prejudiced adult vengefully attacks the children on a dark night - they are unexpectedly delivered from real harm in the film's climax by a mysterious, reclusive neighbor named "Boo" Radley.
- **“Storm Warnings”** – movie about racism in the South, starring Ronald Reagan. No other info available.
- **“American History X”** – Every ACLU member should see this incredible 1998 movie about a violent – but intelligent and articulate – skinhead who comes to see the error of his ways. What makes this movie so great is the Oscar-nominated performance by Edward Norton in the lead role, as a character who has had hatred instilled in him by his racist father and who blames affirmative action for his father's death. As sick as this character's initial racist philosophies are, he is not someone who can be dismissed. Thankfully, we see him transform his views as he realizes the fundamental unfairness of racial stereotypes. **A must-see!!!**
Synopsis: Released from prison after serving three years for the shooting of two black youths, former skinhead Edward Norton tries to shed his past and neo-Nazi friends while working to keep younger brother Edward Furlong from following in his footsteps. Director Tony Kaye's powerful and chilling look at America's racist underground also stars Fairuza Balk, Avery Brooks, Beverly D'Angelo and Stacy Keach.
- **“The Long Walk Home”** – (1990) Synopsis: Acclaimed drama takes a powerful look at the beginnings of the modern civil rights movement, as the 1955 Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott is seen through the eyes of black housekeeper Whoopi Goldberg and well-to-do white employer Sissy Spacek. Their relationship forms a bond that tests each woman's courage.
- **“The Hurricane”** – (1999). Synopsis: Denzel Washington turns in a ferocious, multi-layered performance as Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, the promising boxer wrongly convicted of murdering three men in his hometown of Paterson, New Jersey. His two-decade fight for freedom, as seen through the eyes of a teenage boy and his Canadian foster family who befriend Carter, becomes a worldwide crusade. With Vicellous Reon Shannon, Liev Schreiber and Dan Hedaya; directed by Norman Jewison.

- **“Glory”** – (1989). Synopsis: Stirring Civil War drama recounts the inspiring true story of the Union's 54th Regiment, comprised of black soldiers who had to fight prejudice and neglect to win the chance to prove themselves in battle. Matthew Broderick, as the 54th's white commander, stars along with Morgan Freeman and Denzel Washington, who earned a Best Supporting Actor Oscar.
- **“The Defiant Ones”** -- (1958). Synopsis: One of director Stanley Kramer's most important efforts was this provocative drama with a powerful anti-racist message. Sidney Poitier and Tony Curtis, in Oscar-nominated performances, portray shackled escaped convicts who develop a mutual respect despite the deep-rooted hatred they once felt. Co-stars Lon Chaney, Jr. and Cara Williams.
- **“A Soldier’s Story”** – (1984). Great exploration of racism, anti-white and anti-Tom, and the impact of racism within the black community. Synopsis: The murder of an unpopular black sergeant at a Southern army base in 1944 fans feelings of anger and disharmony in this riveting drama. Howard E. Rollins, Jr. is the military attorney sent to investigate, and Adolph Caesar is the sergeant. Denzel Washington, Larry Riley, Patti LaBelle co-star in this adaptation of Charles Fuller's play; Norman Jewison directs.
- **“Miss Evers' Boys”** -- (1997). Synopsis: One of the more shameful chapters in American history, the "Tuskegee Experiment" of the 1930s, in which Southern black men were left untreated for syphilis so that the effects of the disease could be studied by the federal government, forms the basis for this moving drama. Alfre Woodard, Laurence Fishburne, Craig Sheffer, Joe Morton and Ossie Davis star.

Internment of Japanese-Americans during WWII:

- **“Come See the Paradise”** -- (1990) Synopsis: Powerful, haunting drama from writer/director Alan Parker ("Mississippi Burning"). Dennis Quaid stars as a movie projectionist in late '30s L.A. who meets and marries a Japanese-American woman. Their love is put to the test when, while he's jailed for union activities, she and their daughter are sent to an internment camp following Pearl Harbor. Tamlyn Tomita co-stars.
- **“Snow Falling on Cedars”** – 1999 adaptation of book by same title, one of the most frequently banned or challenged books in America. Synopsis: In 1950s Washington State, Japanese-American Rick Yune stands accused of killing a white fisherman. As the trial threatens to stir up old prejudices, local newspaperman Ethan Hawke must deal with his feelings for the accused's wife (Youki Kudoh), with whom he had a teenage romance that ended with Pearl Harbor and her family's internment in a prison camp. Based on David Guterson's best-selling novel, this lushly photographed drama also stars Max Von Sydow, Sam Shepard.

GLBT/HIV/AIDS:

- **“Philadelphia”** – 1993 movie based on true story of Andrew Beckett.
Synopsis: Tom Hanks won an Academy Award for Best Actor with his stirring portrayal of a successful attorney stricken with AIDS who sues his powerful Philadelphia firm after they dismiss him. The only lawyer who will take his case is homophobic ambulance chaser Denzel Washington. With Jason Robards, Mary Steenburgen and Joanne Woodward; Jonathan Demme directs.
- **“If These Walls Could Talk 2”** – (2000, for HBO). Synopsis: The lives of three lesbian couples are explored in stories set in the same house over three different decades. First, Vanessa Redgrave must deal with discrimination and the loss of her longtime companion in 1961. 1972 finds Michelle Williams and Chloe Sevigny searching for acceptance and love in feminist and gay rights groups. Finally, Ellen DeGeneres and Sharon Stone try to have a baby together amid adversity in the year 2000.
- **“All God’s Children”** – documentary about religious views in equality, including GLBT issues. (No other info available.)
- **“Out of the Past: 400 Years of Lesbian and Gay History in America”** – PBS documentary. Synopsis: From the beginning of American history, homosexuality and love between people of the same sex have been part of the social and political landscape. The documentary Out of the Past recovers facets of our history that have been left out of the textbooks and follows one young woman making history today.
- **“Boys Don’t Cry”** – (1999). Synopsis: Powerful true story of the amazing life and shocking murder of Teena Brandon, a young woman in rural Nebraska who, for several years, lived as male "Brandon Teena" while waiting to undergo a sex-change operation. The superb cast includes Hilary Swank, in an Academy Award-winning performance as the doomed Brandon, and Chloe Sevigny as the factory worker with whom she's romantically involved.

Privacy / 4th Amendment:

- **“Brazil”** -- Terry Gilliam’s 1985 film is a surrealist nightmare of a low-level bureaucrat in a dismal world of the near future.
- **“Enemy of the State”** – 1998 movie that portentously depicts an America transformed into a Surveillance Society. Synopsis: Tightly-wound suspense movie starring Will Smith as a labor lawyer who finds himself in the middle of a web of espionage when he accidentally comes into possession of a videotape featuring the assassination of a U.S. congressman. Gene Hackman is the communications expert who tries to help Smith in battling sinister, hi-tech special agents.

- “**1984**” – original screen adaptation of Orwell book. (No other info available.)
- “**The Siege**” – This 1998 thriller about martial law is pretty farfetched – I mean, this couldn’t really ever *happen*, could it? Read on...
Synopsis: As New York reels from a series of terrorist bombings, FBI agent Denzel Washington and CIA agent Annette Bening search for the militant Arab group responsible. Their hunt takes on new urgency when the government imposes martial law on the city, with tanks patrolling the streets and Arab-American men detained in prison camps, under the command of zealous general Bruce Willis. Intense and thoughtful actioner from director Edward Zwick (“Glory”) also stars Tony Shaloub.

Genetic Privacy:

- “**Gattaca**” – 1997 film starring Ethan Hawke, Uma Thurman and Jude Law. Synopsis: In the 21st century, genetic engineering makes possible the creation of biologically superior human specimens (“valids”), who then grow to positions of power and prestige. Would-be astronaut Vincent (Ethan Hawke) born the old-fashioned way, can only hope for a janitorial position at the elite Gattaca Corporation--until he buys the blood, urine, and identity of a perfect but paralyzed athlete. But a murder in the company’s ranks attracts the attention of a detective who threatens to sniff Vincent out.

Reproductive Rights:

- “**If These Walls Could Talk**” – (1996, for HBO) Synopsis: Three different stories of women faced with unwanted pregnancies are the focus of this powerful film. In 1952, Demi Moore is a recently widowed nurse impregnated by her brother-in-law. Sissy Spacek is the mother of four who discovers a baby is on the way after she returns to college in 1974. And in 1996, Anne Heche, pregnant from an affair with a married man, must choose whether to have the child or not. With Cher (who also directed the final segment).
- “**Citizen Ruth**” – 1996 movie satirizes *both* sides of abortion debate as extremists pushing their political agendas. Synopsis: Trenchant satire about the debate over abortion featuring Laura Dern as the white trash, drug-addicted mother of four who finds herself caught between pro-life fundamentalists and ultra-liberal pro-choicers when she becomes pregnant again. Mary Kay Place, Kurtwood Smith, Swoosie Kurtz, Kelly Preston and Burt Reynolds also star.
- “**Roe v. Wade**” documentary made for tv, 1989.

- **“The Cider House Rules”** – (1999). Synopsis: Writer John Irving's adaptation of his novel set in '40s New England earned him an Academy Award. Young Tobey Maguire leaves the only home he's known, a Maine orphanage run by physician mentor Michael Caine (who took home the Best Supporting Actor Oscar), to find his place in the world. While working on the apple farm of a friend who's gone off to war, Maguire falls for the man's girlfriend (Charlize Theron) and befriends a father/daughter pair of black migrant workers (Delroy Lindo and singer Erykah Badu) who are hiding a dark secret. Lasse Hallstrom directs.
- **“Jane: An Abortion Service”** – (1996); A film by Kate Kirtz and Nell Lundy; 58 minutes. Synopsis: This fascinating political look at a little-known chapter in women's history tells the story of "Jane", the Chicago-based women's health group who performed nearly 12,000 safe illegal abortions between 1969 and 1973 with no formal medical training. As Jane members describe finding feminism and clients describe finding Jane, archival footage and recreations mingle to depict how the repression of the early sixties and social movements of the late sixties influenced this unique group. Both vital knowledge and meditation on the process of empowerment, Jane: An Abortion Service showcases the importance of preserving women's knowledge in the face of revisionist history.
- **“Soldiers In The Army of God”** -- HBO Documentary. Synopsis: A rare, inside look at the leaders and soldiers in training of the most extreme anti-abortion group in the United States, The Army of God. This film candidly explores the reasons behind terrorist tactics, such as bombing clinics and killing doctors, and looks at the chilling effects this violence has had on abortion providers. (Behind the Army of God are men whose profound hatred of women knows no bounds.)

Public Access to Gov't Info/Freedom of the Press:

- **“All the President’s Men”** – 1976 movie about Woodward and Bernstein’s investigation of Watergate, starring Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman.
- **“Network”** -- (1976) Synopsis: Scathing satire of the business of television mixes emotional drama with a far-out peek at future programming. Peter Finch won an Oscar as prophet-like figure Howard Beale; other Oscars went to writer Paddy Chayefsky, Beatrice Straight and Faye Dunaway. William Holden, Robert Duvall co-star.

Prisoners' Rights/Criminal Justice/8th Amendment Issues:

- **“Murder in the First”** – 1994 movie starring Christian Slater and Kevin Bacon, based on true story that led to the closure of Alcatraz.
Synopsis: The true story of Henri Young, a 1930's convict who has been sent to prison for stealing five dollars. But when Young and others attempt to escape, they are caught. As punishment, a naked and wet Young is thrown into a dark, damp, rat-infested cell, where he is his beaten continuously. He emerges from this hellhole three years later a virtual madman -- and promptly kills the inmate who snitched about the escape attempt. Now facing a charge of murder in the first degree, Young is defended by inexperienced go-getter James Stamphill. Although the cards are stacked high against him, the lawyer makes Young plead innocent. Stamphill's plan: to put Alcatraz, and the whole prison system on trial, as both institutions have turned his client into a homicidal maniac.
- **“Gideon’s Trumpet”** – 1980 film based on actual case, *Gideon v. Wainwright*. Synopsis: Henry Fonda stars in the true story of a drifter who is arrested in Florida and convicted without benefit of council. While in prison, he studies law and eventually takes his landmark appeal to the Supreme Court. Jose Ferrer, John Houseman, Fay Wray also star.
- **“A Clockwork Orange”** – 1971 Kubrick Oscar nominee, based on the novel by Anthony Burgess. A violent criminal is conditioned to abhor violence, but when he is released back into society, his inability to summon normal human aggression leaves him unable to defend himself.
- **“Dead Man Walking”** -- 1995 forceful, true-life drama starring Oscar-winner Susan Sarandon as Sister Helen Prejean, a progressive Louisiana nun who decides to serve as spiritual advisor to convicted racist murderer Matthew Poncelet (Sean Penn) before he's executed by lethal injection. Arguments on both sides of death penalty issue.
- **“The Trial”** – original version, 1962. Synopsis: Director/writer Orson Welles took what was once considered an unfilmable novel by Franz Kafka and created a nightmarish vision of a simple clerk (Anthony Perkins) who is inexplicably abducted and charged with an unknown crime by a labyrinthine bureaucracy. Welles co-stars as Perkins' defense advocate; with Jeanne Moreau, Romy Schneider.
- **“12 Angry Men”** – original version 1957 synopsis: Landmark courtroom drama of a murder trial jury whose rush to a guilty verdict is stopped by one member's doubts stars Henry Fonda as the lone dissenter, with Lee J. Cobb, Ed Begley, E.G. Marshall, Jack Klugman, Martin Balsam and John Fiedler among the other antagonistic jurors. Sidney Lumet's first film was scripted by Reginald Rose from his TV play. 1997 remake directed by William Friedkin also available, starring Hume Cronyn, Tony Danza, Ossie Davis, James Gandolfini, Dorian Harewood, Jack Lemmon, Armin Mueller-Stahl, Edward James Olmos, Courtney B. Vance and George C. Scott.

- **“Monsters Ball”** – (2002). Compelling story of a corrections officer (Billy Bob Thornton) and his dysfunctional family in Georgia who administers death by electrocution to a man played by Puff Daddy. It's good because it shows how horrible it is for the people whose "job" it is to carry out the death sentence, and depicts a heart wrenching last conversation between the incarcerated man and his son. Also, the whole movie is chock full of racism. Not an easy one to bear, but nevertheless a good one.

Workers' Rights:

- **“Norma Rae”** – (1979) Synopsis: Sally Field copped a Best Actress Oscar for her performance as a Southern textile worker who joins with a labor organizer to unionize her mill. Ron Leibman, Beau Bridges add able support to this heartfelt drama. Martin Ritt directs.
- **“Metawan”** – John Sayles movie, Mingo County, West Virginia, 1920. Coal miners, struggling to form a union, are up against company operators and gun thugs; Black and Italian miners, brought in by the company to break the strike, are caught between the two forces. Union activist and ex-Wobbly Joe Kenehan, sent to help organize the union, determines to bring the local, Black, and Italian groups together. Drawn from an actual incident; the characters of Sid Hatfield, Cabell Testerman, C. E. Lively, and Few Clothes Johnson were based on real people. Stars include James Earl Jones and Mary McDonnell.

Random ACLU References:

- **“The American President”** – 1995 movie starring Michael Douglas and Annette Bening. Main character's moment of truth comes when he stands up to his chief opponent by, among other things, defending his own card-carrying membership in the ACLU.
Synopsis: Andrew Shepherd (Michael Douglas) is a handsome, youthful widower and a dedicated Democrat raising a teenage daughter. He also just happens to be the president of the United States of America, and a very popular one at that. Unfortunately, he's also quite lonely, and the life of a president leaves little time for dating. But when he meets luminous lobbyist Sydney Ellen Wade (Annette Bening), he's instantly smitten and impulsively (and somewhat awkwardly) asks her out to a state dinner...
- **“Easy Rider”** -- (1969) Synopsis: Drugged-out motorcyclists Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper "head out on the highway" on a search for America in the landmark drama that spoke to a generation. Joining them on their "trip" is spaced-out ACLU lawyer Jack Nicholson. Co-scripted and directed by the stars, the film also features Karen Black, Phil Spector, and music by Jimi Hendrix, The Byrds and others.

- **“Dazed and Confused”** – 1993 movie in which one character is a student athlete who refuses to take an oath that he won’t use drugs. There is also mention of the ACLU in a favorable light.
Synopsis: "The movie that inhales" is a fractured farce set on the last day of school in 1976 in which a diverse group of Austin, Texas, high school students get stoned, partake in hazing pranks, find romance and contemplate the future. Writer/director Richard Linklater's ("Slacker") far-out flashback stars Jason London, Milla Jovovich, Joey Lauren Adams, Ben Affleck, Parker Posey and Matthew McConaughey and features a great period soundtrack.
- **“Beaches”** – (1988). Synopsis: Story of two women who met at the beach when they were children and formed a friendship that would last a lifetime. Filled with song and sentiment, this seriocomic look at two disparate women and the bonds they forge stars Bette Midler and Barbara Hershey; with John Heard, Lanie Kazan, Spalding Gray. (Barbara Hershey’s character is an ACLU lawyer.)
- **“Defending Everybody: A History of the ACLU”** – PBS Documentary on the ACLU, made in the 1990’s. Call National’s Communications (Pub-Ed) Department for a copy.

Movies that have actually been banned or censored in America:

- **“The Tin Drum”** – (1979), was banned in Oklahoma until ACLU challenged this ban in court, read all about it on ACLU-OK’s website.
Synopsis: Fantastic and moving tale about the rise and fall of Nazi Germany as seen through the eyes of a "man-boy" (David Bennett) who "refuses to grow" in order to ignore the horrors around him, venting his anger through a toy drum. Director Volker Schlöndorff’s adaptation of the Gunter Grass novel won the Best Foreign Film Academy Award.
- **“South Park: Bigger, Longer & Uncut”** -- (1999). Synopsis: Trey Parker and Matt Stone bring the colorful citizens of South Park to the big screen in a film that is animatedly hilarious and irreverent.
- **“The Last Temptation of Christ”** – Released in 1998, this movie was considered very controversial, and Christian groups picketed theaters all over the country in opposition to this movie being shown. As a result, some theaters did refuse to run it.
Synopsis: Controversy aside, Martin Scorsese's screen version of Nikos Kazantzakis' novel is a dramatic interpretation of the passion of Christ with a miraculous performance by Willem Dafoe as a self-doubting Savior. Scripted by Paul Schrader, with Harvey Keitel as Judas, Barbara Hershey as Mary Magdalene and David Bowie as Pilate.

- **“Natural Born Killers”** – This movie was released in 1994 and immediately drew fire for its violent content, viewed by many as glorification of violence.

Synopsis: A pointed and darkly humorous look at the American public's fascination with violence, director Oliver Stone's gonzo road movie stars Woody Harrelson and Juliette Lewis as Mickey and Mallory, two lovers whose bloody cross-country crime spree lands them in prison and makes them media-hyped celebrities.

- **“Lolita”** – originally made in 1962 by Stanley Kubrick, remade in 1997 by Adrian Lyne. American theaters would not show this film in 1997.

Synopsis: The movie that was too controversial for American studios is now on home video. Director Adrian Lyne's ("Fatal Attraction") lush, sardonic rendition of the Nabokov novel is driven by Jeremy Irons' gripping performance as Humbert Humbert, the teacher whose obsession with seductive nymphet Dominique Swain leads to tragedy.