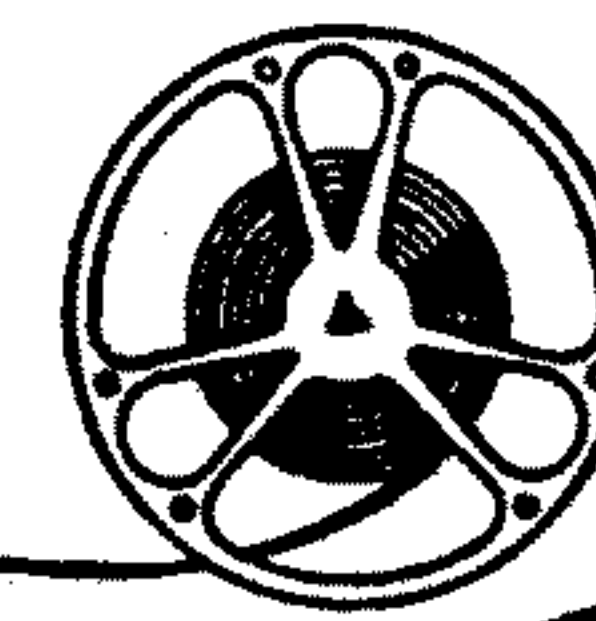
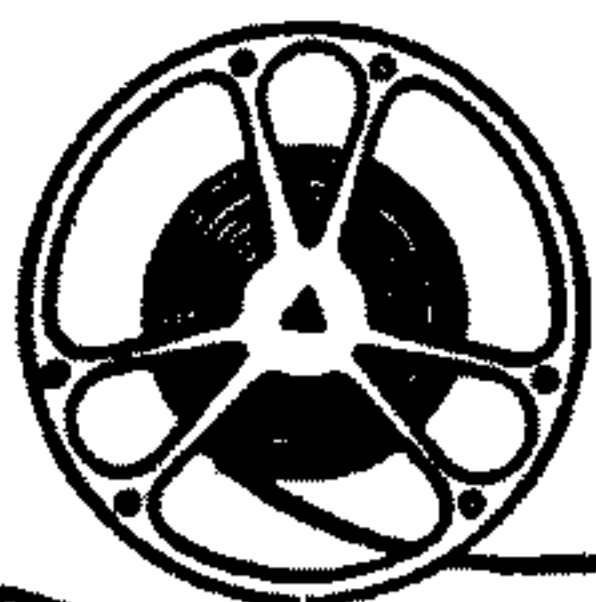


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FURY (1936)

Joe Wilson	Spencer Tracy
Katherine Grant	Sylvia Sidney
District Attorney	Walter Abel
Kirby Dawson	Bruce Cabot
Sheriff	Edward Ellis
"Bugs" Meyers	Walter Brennan

Story by Norman Krasna
Screenplay by Bartlett Cormanck and Fritz Lang
Film edited by Frank Sullivan
Music by Franz Waxman
Directed by Fritz Lang
Produced by Joseph L. Mankiewicz

Perhaps Fritz Lang, the noted German director of FURY, had the best comments about the film: "FURY is the story of mob-action. Lynching was only the result. People the world over respond in the same way. I've been through four revolutions and have made an intimate study of how people act. They often start out in the best of spirits. Suddenly you realize that humor has given way to hate and violence. I attempted to picture that imperceptible line where the change comes. Mob psychiatry fascinates me. I tried to tell a drama of it."

FURY tells the story of a gasoline station owner, Joe Wilson, who by a series of coincidences is arrested on suspicion of kidnapping. A mob gathers and attempts to lynch him. When they are unable to reach him, they burn down the jail. However, at the last minute, Joe's girl friend helps him escape, but he is presumed burned to death in the fire. The second part of the film begins with Joe listening to the trial of twenty-two of the town citizens for his "murder". However, the trial soon becomes a farce, with complete disregard for law and order. This section is well managed and succeeds in giving a bitter taste to the entire problem which had definite parallels in the Nazi situation in Germany and which Lang knew so well.

A section of the dialogue is worth reproducing to show the attitude of the town citizens toward the trial:

First Woman: My husband says it'd be a blessing if the community would forget what happened. It just leaves a bad taste and reminds everybody of what, as the minister said, would better be forgiven and forgotten.

Second Woman: Now don't you worry, Mrs. Garrett. Nobody's going to cut off their noses to spite their faces by naming names in this, this...

Third Woman: But if anyone does talk, what will happen?

Second Woman: Nobody's going to talk. The responsible business men have decided its a Community, not an Individual thing. So everyone's going to stick together against this thing.

Such dialogue as this gives FURY a unique punch. Lang's other personal touches include the magnificent lynching attempt, in which we see a woman holding her child aloft to get a better view, a moronic adolescent hanging on to a vantage point crying out gleefully, "I'm Popeye the sailor man--tweet, tweet!" and a gaping boy biting into his hot dog as he shifts about for a better look at the conflagration.

This was Lang's first American film made after his arrival from Germany, where his wife, the designer Thea von Harbou, had gone over to the Nazis. It has been said that his American films had more local color and a keener perception of national characteristics than films by Americans dealing with similar subject matter. Lang was deeply concerned with the problems of America, and it was a sobering thought to read that there were over six thousand lynchings between 1887 and 1936 in the United States. Cinematically, the film is almost flawless, outside of an excusable final concession to the box office (after all, the film was made by MGM and the fact that it was made at all is somewhat amazing). It is interesting, and a bit frightening, to know that the film includes some mob scenes photographed at a real lynching in California in 1934. The acting is excellent throughout, and Spencer Tracy made his first big success as Joe Wilson. Sylvia Sydney is a sympathetic sweetheart, and Walter Brennan is particularly telling in his short part as the dim-witted "Bugs". As the critic of the Herald Tribune summed up the film, "FURY remains a compelling and terrifying document".

David Stewart Hull