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The D.A.'s Men by Jim Doherty

Everyone remembers Paul Drake, the private eye who did Perry Mason's legwork, providing Mason with the clues needed to get his innocent client off by identifying the real killer.

In real life, prosecutors employ their own "Paul Drakes," and, unlike Drake, these investigators are actual cops.

Sometimes they're employed directly by the prosecutor's office. The Investigations Bureau of the Cook County State's Attorney's Office employs over 200 detectives; all by themselves, one of the largest police forces in Illinois.

Sometimes they're staffed by outside agencies. Detectives in the Massachusetts State Police work out of the DA's Office of whichever county they're assigned to, conducting major investigations, and assisting the prosecutor with his cases.

Sometimes it's a combination. The DA's of the five boroughs of NYC each employ investigators working directly for their respective offices; in addition, the NYPD provides detectives to serve in the DA's Squad of each borough.

Following are the ten novels I consider the best at depicting this particular police specialty in fiction. Short stories, movies, and TV shows will be listed on the *MRJ* website.

The Glass Key (Knopf, 1931) by Dashiell Hammett

This book is often pointed to as the only one of Hammett's novels in which the protagonist is *not* a professional detective.

But this isn't quite the case.

True, Ned Beaumont doesn't normally make his living by investigating crimes, as other Hammett heroes do, but by chance, the turn of a card or the roll of a pair of dice.

However, when Beaumont finds himself in a position in which he needs some police authority to bring about a desired effect (the payment of money owed to him by a crooked gambler), he asks his close friend, political fixer Paul Madvig, to arrange to have him appointed as a "deputy sheriff or something."

As it happens, Madvig needs someone on the inside of the district attorney's office because of a hot homicide case (the murder of a senator's son). The DA hopes to make political hay out of it, to the disadvantage of Madvig. So Madvig arranges for Beaumont to be appointed a DA's investigator, giving Beaumont the badge and law enforcement authority he needs, and Madvig the inside man at the DA's Office *he* needs.

It's barely enough to get a book even considered, let alone placed, on a list like this. But we're talking about Dashiell freakin' Hammett, for crying out loud! And when Hammett writes a book in which the protagonist is a DA's investigator, even if only nominally, and only for selfish purposes, it automatically gets placed on a list like this.

Emperor of Evil (Stokes, 1937) by Carroll John Daly

Next year, 2023, is the centennial of the hard-boiled detective story. As created by Dashiell Hammett, so we're often told. But it ain't necessarily so.

Dashiell Hammett's first hard-boiled private eye story, "Arson Plus" (*Black Mask*, 1 Oct. 1923), was preceded by Carroll John Daly's first two hard-boiled private eye stories, "Three-Gun Terry" (*Black Mask*, 15 May 1923) and "Knights of the Open Palm" (*Black Mask*, 1 June 1923). Thus, to the consternation of many, Daly is generally regarded as the hard-boiled school's Founder.

After private eye Race Williams (used by Daly fan Mickey Spillane as a template for Mike Hammer), and NYPD Detective Satan Hall (the Commissioner's personal gunfighter), Daly's third most popular character was another NYPD officer, Detective Vee Brown.

At first glance, Brown seems a clone of Hall, a detective sent out to deal with the most horrific crimes with a matched brace of pistols, leaving a trail of criminal corpses in his wake. But there *are* differences.

First, Brown's actually rather small in stature. Athletic and in good health, he's still only a fly-weight fighting his way through a criminal world of heavyweights. His twin .45's are *literal* "equalizers."

Second, he's assigned to work directly out of the Manhattan DA's Office, rather than the Commissioner's Office (qualifying him for inclusion here).

Third, he's got a second career that's made him wealthy enough that the police work's almost a hobby. Under the pseudonym "Vivian," he writes chart-topping songs that are favorably compared to the works of Cole Porter or the Gershwins.

Finally, rather than narrating his own stories, like Race, or having them described by an omniscient third person narrator, like Satan, Brown has a "Watson" of sorts. Dean Condon, an old college buddy of Brown's, now a reporter assigned

exclusively to the newsworthy DA's man.

Emperor of Evil is the second of two novels about Brown, the first being **Murder Won't Wait** (Ives Washburn, 1933), both serialized in *Dime Detective* prior to book publication.

Emperor, which I personally prefer, pits Brown and Condon against a master blackmailer, whose hold on the rich and powerful is so strong that, after bleeding them dry, he can force them into suicide when they're bankrupted.

As in any Daly novel, there's lots of action, lots of bullets flying, and a sweet young thing who, through no fault of her own, is caught up in the master villain's web. Daly loved melodrama. He served it up with a trowel.

Hardback copies of **Emperor** are hard to find, and expensive when found, but Altus Press and Steeger Books have collected the entire series in **The Complete Adventures of Vee Brown**. The first volume (2014) includes all of **Murder Won't Wait**. The installments making up **Emperor of Evil** are split between **Volume One** and **Volume Two** (2019).

Carry My Coffin Slowly (Simon & Schuster, 1951) by Lee Herrington

Barney Moffat is the Chief Investigator for the County Attorney's Office in an unnamed Mid-western city (internal evidence suggests that it's Kansas City). A solid cop, he's personally close to his boss. The prosecutor, on the other hand, is often not quite up to the job, and Barney has to prop him up. In some ways, Barney runs the office.

In this novel, Barney's investigating a case that involves safecracking, murder, corruption, political chicanery, and, since he's not protected by civil service, the possible loss of his job.

Herrington wrote at least one short story about Moffat for *Black Mask*. This was his first novel, and his last. It was nominated for an Edgar for Best First Novel (losing to Mary McMullen's **Strangle Hold**, Harper, 1951), but Herrington

passed away in 1952, still only in his 40s. It's possible he never even knew his only novel was nominated.

Barney Moffat, headlining only one short story and one novel, barely qualifies as a series character, but, had his creator lived a few more years, it's possible Moffat might have become one of the seminal figures in the burgeoning sub-genre that Anthony Boucher dubbed the "police procedural."

The Blind Spot (Lippincott, 1966) by Joseph Harrington

This is the second of Harrington's well-regarded trilogy of novels featuring Frank Kerrigan, NYPD. Kerrigan tracked down a crucial witness in an Organized Crime case during a temporary posting to the Manhattan DA's Office in the series opener, **The Last Known Address** (Lippincott, 1965). In the interim between books, he has been promoted to "Acting Lieutenant" and appointed to the DA's Squad on a permanent basis.

Kerrigan is assigned the seemingly pointless task of reviewing the evidence that led to the conviction of a young lady named Laurie Callender, currently serving twenty to life for the murder of her lover. She insists she's innocent, though the DA is sure this can't possibly be true. Nevertheless, to avoid political fallout, he wants every "i" dotted and every "t" crossed.

But as Kerrigan retraces the steps, he becomes convinced that the defendant is wholly innocent of the crime.

Kerrigan doesn't regard himself as any kind of deductive genius, but he's a determined plodder, who knows the best way to find out what really happened is GOYAKOD ("Get Off Your Ass & Knock On Doors"). But will he eventually find the *right* door, the one that leads, not only to Miss Callender's vindication, but to the identity of the actual killer?

An excellent entry in an excellent series.

The Bait (Simon & Schuster, 1968) by Dorothy Uhnak

When Detective Christie Opara, the only woman assigned to the Manhattan DA's Squad, gets pulled out of a highly important undercover operation to intervene in the machinations of a "weenie-wagger" about to expose himself to two little girls, she's sure she's going to get busted back into uniform, and sent back the Police-women's Bureau. Her boss, Assistant DA Casey Reardon, isn't likely to sympathize with her concern for two unknown children.

But Christie's judgment is vindicated. The arrestee, Murray Rogoff, isn't just an exhibitionist. He's a serial killer, now obsessed with the pretty young cop who arrested him. So, at the front lines of a major homicide case, her job's to lure Rogoff into a place where he can kill her, and thus be caught in the act.

Dorothy Uhnak spent over a decade in the New York City Transit Authority Police (since absorbed into the NYPD). Her last assignment was to the Manhattan DA's Squad. She presents police work with the authority of one who did the job and the skill of a born writer. Two years before Joseph Wambaugh's first novel, **The New Centurions** (Little, Brown, 1970), Ms. Uhnak was making a real name for herself as a novelist. She would write eight more novels, several of them *New York Times* best-sellers, and an autobiography, **Policewoman** (Simon & Schuster, 1964).

The Bait won the Edgar for Best First Novel (ironically tying with another police procedural about the hunt for a serial killer, **Silver Street**, Harper, 1968, by E. Richard Johnson, who, even more ironically, was a convict doing time for murder, an odd kind of counterpoint to Mrs. Uhnak's being a cop).

A.P.B. (Ballantine, 1987) by Dave Pedneau

This is the first of six novels featuring Whit Pynchon, Chief Investigator for Prosecuting Attorney's Office in largely rural Raven County,

West Virginia. In fact, he's the only investigator in the PA's Office. And his boss, PA Tony Danton, is the only lawyer.

Whit's irascible, antisocial, and easily offended. And he really *hates* Raven County, wanting nothing more than to complete the absolute minimum of years needed to retire, so he can move away. But he's also the best cop in Raven County, and, since there's a dearth of really experienced detectives, Danton has decreed that Pynchon will be the lead officer on all homicide cases, and will also be the investigating officer on any personnel complaints lodged against any of the local police officers in Raven County. Simultaneously a one-man Homicide Squad and a one-man Internal Affairs Detail for all of Raven County's police agencies.

When the wife of a well-liked and highly respected Raven County deputy sheriff (even Pynchon likes him) is found murdered, found by her husband who was dispatched to investigate a possible dead body, Danton puts Pynchon on the case.

Shortly after he begins his investigation, more murders, all of family members of Raven County law officers, occur. Pynchon's on the trail of a serial killer whose victim pool is the loved ones of Raven County cops.

Interfering with his investigation is a newly arrived reporter, Annie Tyson-Tyree, working the police beat for the *Millbrook Journal*, Raven County's local paper.

The cop and the journalist dislike each other on sight (or, more correctly, sound, since they met over the phone).

But the dislike is soon mitigated when they meet face-to-face and find themselves, against their mutual better judgment, attracted to each other. The subsequent romance lasts for the entire series.

Solidly written cop novel, with a matter-of-fact style that displays Pedneau's experience as a newspaperman, as well as his experience working

as a magistrate court judge, and as a civilian employee for the sheriff's office in his county.

Pedneau wrote five more Pynchon novels, all using titles deriving from common police acronyms such as **B.O.L.O.** (Ballantine, 1989), **A.K.A.** (Ballantine, 1990), and **B.& E.** (Fawcett, 1991). All were paperback originals, and can be hard to find at a reasonable price, but all of them are also currently available on Kindle.

Pork City (St. Martin's, 1988) by Howard Browne

A historical police procedural, fictionalizing the 1930 murder of *Chicago Tribune* reporter Jake Lingle, by top-flight crime novelist Howard Browne, the creator of Chicago PI Paul Pine.

Lingle was killed shortly after entering the Randolph Street train station, in Chicago's Loop. He was followed by two men, one of whom drew a revolver and shot the reporter in the back of the head. Death was virtually instantaneous.

Colonel Robert McCormick, the owner and publisher of the *Tribune*, announced a reward for information leading to the identity of Lingle's killer, and also demanded that the lead agency investigating the case be the Cook County State's Attorney's Office, rather than the Chicago PD.

Thus, Pat Roche, Chief Investigator for the State's Attorney, became the cop on the case rather than a Chicago homicide detective.

Roche was a real-life figure, and he really did have a reputation as one of the few honest cops in the Chicago area. Accordingly, his fictional counterpart goes about his assignment sincerely meaning to find Lingle's murderer.

But uncovering the truth may be more embarrassing for McCormick, and the *Tribune*, than simply leaving the case unsolved. As Roche goes about his assigned task of finding the murderer, it becomes clear that Lingle was killed, not because he was a heroic martyr who died defending the principles of a Free Press, but because of his own criminal and racketeering activities.

A suspect is eventually developed. But is he the actual killer, or just a patsy chosen to get the heat turned down on both the Capone Outfit and the *Tribune*?

The Lingle murder has also been fictionalized in the movie *The Finger Points* (Warner's, 1931), in an episode of the original *The Untouchables* (ABC, 1959-63) titled "The Jake Lingle Killing," and in a two-part episode of the revived version of *The Untouchables* (Syndicated, 1993-94) titled "Murder Ink."

But none did it better than Howard Browne. *Pork City* is probably Browne's finest work. And that's saying a lot.

Perfect Cover (Hyperion, 1994) by Linda Chase and Joyce St. George

TV writer Linda Chase, and Joyce St. George, who spent several years as an investigator for a Special Prosecutors Office instituted by the governor to investigate Organized Crime and police corruption, fictionalize several of Ms. St. George's actual cases in a riveting novel that calls to mind J.J. Marric's Gideon series, in which several unrelated cases were juggled through each book.

The protagonist, like Ms. St. George an investigator for a Special Prosecutor appointed by the governor, is Italian/Puerto Rican Tina Paris, who's got three major cases to run down

Case number one is a crooked cop who operates a floating high-stakes card game, and who has killed someone who won too much.

Case number two is a veteran judge and his state assemblyman son, who are using mob connections to advance their respective careers. Tina goes undercover as a Mafia moll wannabe to get the goods on them.

Case number three is the search for a serial rapist who plays Russian Roulette with his victims while debasing them, finally pulling the trigger as he climaxes. So far, none of his victims have died, but, if he's actually using live ammo, it's only a matter of time.

Solid writing and a realistic, if not voyeuristic, depiction of the various crimes make this a novel well worth seeking out.

Hot Springs (Simon & Schuster, 2000) by Stephen Hunter

It's 1946, and First Sergeant Earl Swagger, USMC, has just had the Congressional Medal of Honor pinned to his uniform by President Truman himself. Now the only problem he has is trying to decide what to do with the rest of his life.

An option is almost immediately presented to him. As soon as the ceremony is over, Swagger is approached by two men, District Attorney Fred Becker of Garland County, Arkansas, and Becker's Chief Investigator, former FBI Agent D.A. Parker. They offer Swagger the job of being Parker's number two man. Swagger's task will be to recruit a team of young, fire-eating "super-cops" from all over the country, to form an "Untouchables"-like special squad, then to lead that squad on raids of the illegal gambling locales, bordellos, drug shooting galleries, etc., that are blighting the resort town of Hot Springs.

Swagger accepts the offer with alacrity, recruits his team, and spends the next several hundred pages or so leading them on a series of raids that invariably end in blistering hot and heavy gun battles.

The Mob, led by New York gangster Owney Maddox (a thinly fictionalized version of real-life hoodlum Owney Madden), pull some political strings to get the Governor of Arkansas to order the DA's raiding team disbanded and disarmed, and things start to go downhill from there. An ambush of the now-disarmed squad leaves most of them dead, including Swagger's mentor, D.A. Parker.

And, as things are coming to a head, Swagger's wife, heavily pregnant since the award ceremony at the White House, goes into labor, and the only physician well-trained enough to get her through the difficult childbirth is black, which doesn't sit

well with local KKK types.

So now, stripped of his badge and his gun, Swagger has to deal, all by himself, with the organized crime types who've been running things in Hot Springs for as long as anyone can recall, as well as a bigoted mob intent on seeing Mrs. Swagger and her child die rather than be tended to by a black man.

I won't say it all ends well, but I *will* say that Swagger returns for three more novels, **Pale Horse Coming** (Simon and Schuster, 2001), **Havana** (Simon and Schuster, 2003), and the upcoming **The Bullet Garden** (Atria, 2023).

The Reversal (Little, Brown, 2010) by Michael Connelly

When flamboyant criminal defense lawyer Mickey Haller, introduced in Connelly's novel **The Lincoln Lawyer** (Little, Brown, 2005), is offered the post of "special prosecutor" to retry a vicious kidnapper/murderer whose conviction has been overturned, he accepts, on the condition that his ex-wife, L.A. County Deputy DA Maggie McPherson be his second chair, and legendary LAPD Homicide Detective Harry Bosch (who happens to be Haller's half-brother) is appointed to be his investigator for the duration of the trial.

Jason Jessup, the convicted child murderer of

12-year-old Melissa Landy, has been granted a second trial. He's represented by opportunistic defense specialist Clive "Clever Clive" Royce, who mounts a publicity campaign painting Jessup as the innocent victim of a miscarriage of justice brought about by perjured testimony. His main aim is not the vindication of his client so much as winning a sizeable monetary compensation from the state, of which Royce will be entitled to a hefty percentage.

Haller plays a hunch, and agrees to bail for Jessup, since he and Bosch both believe that Melissa was unlikely to have been his only victim, and evidence of those other crimes is more likely to come to light if Jessup is out and about.

Eventually, thanks as much to Bosch's detective skills as to Haller's courtroom skills, Jessup's on the verge of being convicted a second time. Instead of waiting for the verdict, Jessup takes it on the lam, and now Haller and Bosch are faced with a whole new problem.

This is an exciting and suspenseful novel, one of Connelly's best, and that's saying quite a lot, since Connelly's been one of the most consistently satisfying crime novelists of the last 30-odd years

Addendum [Website only]

Short Stories

"With His Enemies' Aid" by Jack J. Gottlieb
(*Black Mask*, Mar. 1, 1923)

A murder mystery set within the very walls of the DA's Office, solved by intrepid investigator. Early as this is (it's a full century old this year!), this was actually the last of eight stories Gottlieb wrote for *Black Mask*, the first appearing almost exactly a year earlier. He would, however, continue contributing to other magazines for a few more years.

"The Call to Kill" by Carroll John Daly (*Dime Detective*, April 1932)

The fourth story to feature Detective Vee Brown, NYPD, top gun for the Manhattan DA. In this one, he's staying at a rural cabin upstate, recuperating from wounds received in his most recent encounter with the Forces of Gandom. He meets an engaging little girl, the daughter of his neighbors, who captures his heart. Naturally his enemies find out about the child who's generated these tender feelings, and kidnap her, intending

to use her as a lever to control Brown. Unsurprisingly, that turns out to be a mistake. Reprinted in **The Complete Cases of Vee Brown – Volume One** (Altus, 2014).

“There’s Always a Woman” by Wilson Collison (*American Magazine*, Jan. 1937)

Light-hearted, breezy, *Thin Man*-ish tale about an former DA’s man, trying to make it as a private eye, who, up against it financially, has to close his office and return to his old job gumshoeing for the Manhattan District Attorney. In the meantime, without his knowledge, his dizzy wife tries to keep the PI business running.

“Racket Buster” by Eric Howard (*Black Mask*, July 1937)

Second, and best, of two stories featuring tough, cool DA’s Investigator Kelly, busting up organized crime activities. Kelly made his debut in “The Mugg from Frisco” (*BM*, Mar. 1937). This was Howard’s last *Black Mask* appearance, but he’d continue to be prolific, contributing to other pulps like *Detective Fiction Weekly* and *Street & Smith’s Detective Stories*. It’s not clear whether any of them featured Kelly.

“Don’t Make It Murder” by John K. Butler (*Black Mask*, Feb. 1941)

McCarey, DA’s man, looks into a suspicious death that might be murder. But might not. Butler was a frequent contributor to *Black Mask* and other pulps, and also worked as a screenwriter. Best-remembered as the creator of crime-solving cabbie Stephen Middleton Knight, aka “Steve Midnight.”

“Merely Murder” by Julius Long (*Black Mask*, July 1944)

First of 16 stories featuring Ben Corbett, the DA’s Chief Investigator. Ripe for a reprinting by some specialty house like Steeger or Black Lizard. Long, like Erle Stanley Gardner, was an attorney turned pulp writer.

“Bury Me Last” by W. Lee Herrington (*Black Mask*, July 1948)

Short story introducing Barney Moffatt, Chief Investigator for a county prosecutor’s office in an unnamed Midwestern state. Moffatt would go on to be featured in Herrington’s only novel, the Edgar-nominated **Carry My Coffin Slowly** (Simon and Schuster, 1951). That story and novel appear to be Moffat’s only two appearances.

“Search for a Man” by Joseph Harrington (*Redbook*, Jan. 1964)

Short story condensation of **The Last Known Address** (Lippincott, 1964), the excellent novel that introduced plodding but implacable Frank Kerrigan, NYPD, temporarily assigned to the Manhattan DA’s Office to track down a crucial witness in an important Organized Crime case.

“The Ledger” by Dorothy Uhnak (*Cosmopolitan*, Oct. 1970)

Short story condensation of Mrs. Uhnak’s third novel, also titled **The Ledger** (Simon and Schuster, 1970), the final entry in her trilogy featuring Detective Christie Opara, NYPD, Manhattan DA’s Squad. She’s guarding the mistress of a major Mob figure, who refuses to testify against her lover. Meanwhile, the rest of the squad seeks documentary evidence, a financial ledger that will prove the gangster’s guilt. But that ledger may be closer to Christie than anyone suspects.

“The Murder of Ernest Trapnell” by Erik Arneson (*Mary Higgins Clark Mystery Magazine*, Fall 1998)

Peter Eckert, recently passed over for the position of Chief Detective for the Lebanon County, PA, District Attorney’s Office, and his new boss, former NYPD Detective Jake Morgan, are uncomfortably working together on the murder of a low-level local hood named Ernest Trapnell. Developing competing theories, they make a friendly bet about which of them is right, and, in the process of trying to prove their competing

theories, take a step toward becoming real partners. Reprinted in Arneson's collection, *The Throes of Crime* (CreateSpace, 2016).

Movies

The Secret Six (MGM, 1931), written by Francis Marion, directed by George W. Hill.

Heavily fictionalized depiction of the real-life story of six prominent businessmen who set themselves up as an anonymous citizens' crime committee to bring down Al Capone (doctored up into a character named "Slaughterhouse" Scorpio, and played by Wallace Beery). Seventh-billed Clark Gable, not yet the box office king he would become in a few short years, was cast as Carl Luckner, simultaneously a police reporter and an undercover investigator for the DA's Office (which sounds like a conflict of interest, but let that pass), who finally brings Scorpio down. Jean Harlow provided feminine interest in this film, the first of six in which she and Gable were paired. Ralph Bellamy made his movie debut in this film.

Missing Witnesses (Warners, 1937), written by Kenneth Gamet and Don Ryan; directed by William Clemens.

Two-fisted NYPD Detective "Bull" Regan (Dick Purcell) is not pleased when he's removed from regular duty and assigned as an investigator to the newly appointed Special Rackets Prosecutor. Initially anxious to get back to breaking criminal skulls on the sidewalks of New York, he soon finds that being part of bringing down a powerful mob boss like Ward Sturgis (Harland Tucker) might be a greater piece of police work than just busting the heads of street thugs. Mary Norton (Virginia Dale) veers from innocent bystander, to murder suspect, to damsel in distress, capturing Bull's heart in the process. Inspired by, if not directly based on, the activities of Thomas E. Dewey, first as NYC's "Special Rackets Prosecutor," then as Manhattan DA.

There's Always a Woman (Columbia, 1938), written by Gladys Lehman, based on the short story by Wilson Collison; directed by Alexander Hall.

Film version of the short story listed above, with Melvyn Douglas as the former DA's Investigator, turned private eye, turned back to DA's man when he can't make the detective agency profitable; and Joan Blondell as his wife. Breezily humorous whodunit in the manner (*deliberately* in the manner) of the "Thin Man" movies, it led to a sequel, *There's That Woman Again* (Columbia, 1938), with Douglas, back to being a PI, and Virginia Bruce replacing Miss Blondell as his wife. Douglas and Miss Blondell were reunited for a third movie, *The Amazing Mr. Williams* (Columbia, 1939), in which the names of their characters are changed, as well as the relationship between the two (they're engaged rather than married), but which is obviously in the same vein as the first two films.

Silent Witness (Monogram, 1943) written by Martin Mooney; directed by Jean Yarbrough.

Betty Higgins (Marris Wrixon), special investigator for the district attorney's office, is romantically involved with criminal defense lawyer Bruce Strong (Frank Albertson), but attracted to her boss, DA Robert Holden (Bradley Page). When Strong uses questionable tactics to discredit Betty's case against a pair of racketeering brothers, Betty angrily breaks off with him, leaving her free to be pursued by DA Bob. When the criminal brothers frame Bruce for murder, Betty's able to clear him, with the help of a dog who actually saw the murder, the titular "silent witness." Surprisingly well-made film from the notorious "Poverty Row" studio, unusual for having a woman in the main cop role, years before major studios explored that concept in films like *Mary Ryan - Detective* (Columbia, 1949) with Marsha Hunt, *Women from Headquarters* (Republic, 1950) with Virginian Huston, or *Undercover Girl* (Universal, 1950) with Alexis Smith.

The Enforcer (Warner's, 1950) written by Martin Rackin; directed by Bretaigne Windust (Raoul Walsh).

Not to be confused with the identically titled "Dirty Harry" film from 1976, this movie is loosely (*very* loosely) based on the efforts of the Brooklyn DA's Office to get the goods on Louis "Lepke" Buchalter for being the chief of what the newspapers dubbed "Murder, Inc." In real life, Buchalter was already doing life for dope smuggling and labor racketeering, thanks to the efforts of Special Prosecutor/Manhattan DA Thomas Dewey. In the film, Assistant DA Martin Ferguson (Humphrey Bogart), a character loosely modeled on real-life Brooklyn Assistant DA Burton Turkis, is trying to nail Albert Mendoza (loosely modeled on Lepke, and played by Everett Sloane), the founder and chief executive of a murder-for-hire ring.

Though the main character is a prosecutor, rather than an investigator for the prosecutor's office, I'm counting this film since Ferguson spends all his time on the street investigating, and is even the one who shoots it out with a hit man at the movie's climax, while spending not one solitary second in court. Moreover, the character who *is* a DA's investigator, Captain Frank Nelson (Roy Roberts), functions as the "partner" in the case, with Ferguson being "Joe Friday" while Nelson fills the "Frank Smith" or "Bill Gannon" slot. Veering far from its true-life source, this film is, nevertheless, a driving, suspenseful piece of movie-making. Bretaigne Windust is credited as the director, but most sources indicate that legendary Raoul Walsh, who'd already made such outstanding gangster films as *The Roaring Twenties*, *High Sierra*, and *White Heat*, was the guy actually sitting in the director's chair for most of the filming.

Mystery Street (MGM, 1951) written by Sidney Boehm and Richard Brooks; directed by John Sturges.

When the skeletal remains of a pregnant woman are found partially buried in the dunes of a Cape Cod beach, Massachusetts State Police Det. Lt. Peter Moralas (Ricardo Montalban), assigned to the Barnstable County DA's Office, is directed by his boss, the District Attorney, to have those remains delivered to Harvard University's Department of Legal Medicine. The audience already knows who the victim is, and who killed her. Harvard's forensic experts will ferret out the information in the lab, while Moralas, working with several Boston Police detectives, does the slogging legwork. Montalban gives one of his best performances, and he's backed up by a fine cast including former Olympian and Tarzan portrayer Bruce Bennet as the chief of Harvard's forensics lab, Marshall Thompson as a poor schlub who winds up being the chief suspect, Jan Sterling as the victim, and Edmond Ryan as a highbrow, upper-class snob who is the actual murderer. Photographed by John Alton, the man who put the *noir* in film *noir*.

Slaughter on 10th Avenue (Universal, 1957) written by Lawrence Roman, based on the book **The Man Who Rocked the Boat** (Harper, 1956) by William Keating and Richard Carter; directed by Arnold Laven

An honest dock boss (Mickey Shaughnessy) is murderously attacked by thugs in the pay of labor racketeer Al Dahlke (Walter Matthau). The cop on the case, Lt. Anthony Vosnick (Charles McGraw), will be reporting to Assistant DA Bill Keating (Richard Egan), who'll be supervising the investigation. Again, as with *The Enforcer* above, the prosecutor on the case is actually doing a lot of boots-on-the-ground investigative work, though unlike *The Enforcer*, Keating actually spends a short portion of the movie in court. And Vosnick, assigned to Keating, is a major figure. This fact-based film was both a critical and financial hit, although, hitting theatres some three years after the Oscar-winning **On the**

Waterfront, it seemed to be going over old ground.

The Case Against Brooklyn (Columbia, 1958) written by Raymond T. Marcus and Daniel Ullman, based on the article “I Broke the Brooklyn Graft Scandal” (*True*, Feb. 1951) by Ed Reid; directed by Paul Wendkos.

When crime journalist Ed Reid (who plays himself in this film), exposes the level of graft and corruption being spread around Brooklyn by Organized Crime, the Brooklyn DA arranges to have several recent NYPD Police Academy graduates assigned to his office as undercover agents, on the theory that, having been plucked straight from the tree, rather than pulled out of the barrel, they’ll be untainted by corruption. One of these rookies is Pete Harris (Darren McGavin), a veteran of ten years in the military, who’s a few years older, and a lot less callow, than the other academy grads. His decision to accept the assignment has tragic consequences. Top-level, fact-based cop drama, one of the first to explore the topic of police corruption. “Raymond T. Marcus” was a joint pseudonym for Bernard Gordon and Julian Zimet, who, having been blacklisted, weren’t able to get screenwriting assignments under their own names.

Mystic River (2003) written by Brian Koppelman, based on the novel by Dennis Lehane; directed by Clint Eastwood.

Lehane’s award-winning novel became an award-winning film starring Kevin Bacon as the cop, Massachusetts State Police Detective Sean Devine, working out of the Suffolk County DA’s Office, Sean Penn as the one-time criminal turned storekeeper and family man, and Tim Robbins as their hapless one-time friend. It was nominated for five Oscars, copping two of them, and won or was nominated for a boatload of others from organizations ranging from the National Board of Review to the Screen Actors Guild to the National Society of Film Critics.

Secret in Their Eyes (STX Films, 2015) written and directed by Billy Ray; based on the novel *La pregunta des sus ojos* (Galerna, 2005) by Eduardo Sacheri.

Julia Roberts plays Jess Cobb, an investigator with the LA County DA’s Office, who’s working with FBI Agent Ray Kasten (Chiwetel Ejiofor) on a terrorism case. Their investigation is interrupted by the murder of Jess’s daughter. The case plays out over the next thirteen years, as Jess, Ray, and the other investigators continue their jobs, or move on to others, the unresolved murder of the daughter of one of their own always hanging over them. Moody crime drama, based on an Argentine novel which, in turn became the highly praised Argentine crime film *El secreto do sus ojos* (Haddock Films 2012).

Television shows

The DA’s Man (NBC, 1959)

John Compton portrayed Shannon (no first name was ever given), top undercover investigator for the Manhattan DA’s Office, in Jack Webb’s second cop series, debuting the season after the original *Dragnet* ended. It was loosely based on the autobiography **The DA’s Man** (Crown, 1957) by former Manhattan DA’s Investigator Harold R. “Dan” Danforth with journalist James B. Horan, which won the MWA Edgar for Best Fact-Crime Book. Shannon’s contact men during his undercover gigs were Assistant DA Al Bonscarsi (Ralph Manza) and NYPD Detective Frank LaValle (Herb Ellis), assigned to the police department’s Manhattan DA’s Squad. Solidly produced, as most of Webb’s shows were, with good, tight scripts. However, Compton was neither as dynamic nor as intense a lead player as Webb had been playing Joe Friday. Apparently trying to channel Webb, he just couldn’t project the same level of forceful determination that Webb had. Danforth served as the show’s technical advisor, while Horan was the show’s story consultant.

For the People (CBS, 1965)

Not to be confused with either the identically titled Lifetime series (2002-03), starring Lea Thompson, nor the ABC series (2018-19) featuring federal prosecutors, this mid-season replacement was William Shatner's first starring role in a TV series, debuting about a year and a half before the original *Star Trek*. Though ostensibly about Manhattan prosecutor David Kostner (Shatner), it also featured Lonny Chapman as Frank Malloy, a DA's investigator working under Kostner. Many, perhaps most of the episodes (including the pilot) depicted the investigative work of Malloy to a greater degree than the courtroom prowess of Kostner. Filmed on location in NYC, this short-lived program was a classy piece of television drama, one that, by focusing on prosecutors, was very unusual in an era awash with legal dramas like *Perry Mason*, *The Law and Mr. Jones*, *The Defenders*, *Sam Benedict*, and *Judd for the Defense*, all of which featured criminal defense lawyers.

Hawk (ABC, 1966)

Burt Reynolds, having played supporting characters in *Riverboat* and *Gunsmoke*, got his first lead role in this series. He portrayed the titular character, Det. Lt. John Hawk, a full-blooded Iroquois and an NYPD officer assigned to the Manhattan DA's Squad, working the night shift. He rounded up the usual run of bad guys faced by TV cops, drug pushers, serial killers, organized crime figures, kidnappers, etc. Filmed on location, the show had an authentic look, as did Reynolds who was (or at least claimed to be) part Cherokee.

Kiss Me... Kill Me (ABC, 1976)

Surprisingly frank (for 1976) TV-movie in which LA County DA's Investigator Stella Stafford (Stella Stevens) works with Homicide Detective Harry Grant (Claude Akins), an old friend from her former job with the LAPD, on the murder of a young, handicapped schoolteacher,

uncovering the secret, and kinky, sex life she kept hidden from her friends, family, and colleagues. Appearances by Pat O'Brien, Robert Vaughn, Bruce Boxleitner, et. al. The frank discussion of gay lifestyles, BDSM, etc., was very unusual for the era. Produced by Columbia TV, many of the people behind the camera worked on Columbia's critical and ratings hit *Police Story* (NBC, 1973-80), also known for its frankness. Since Miss Stevens projected the same kind of sexy, blonde attractiveness as Angie Dickinson, along with a similar air of professional competence, it's possible that the movie was intended as a series pilot that would give ABC its own counterpart to *Police Woman* (NBC, 1974-78), which was itself a spin-off from *Police Story*.

Jake and the Fatman (CBS, 1987-92)

When Fred Silverman left his career as a TV network exec to become an independent TV producer, he showed a decided preference for crime shows, and particularly courtroom dramas (e.g. *Matlock* and the revival of *Perry Mason* as a series of two-hour episodes, with Raymond Burr returning to the role). *Jake and the Fatman*, about the partnership between District Attorney J.L. McCabe (William Conrad) and his chief investigator, Lt. Jacob Styles (Joe Penny), who worked in a large West Coast metropolitan area that closely resembled, but was never specifically identified as, Los Angeles County, was, in fact, a semi-spin-off of *Matlock*. The scripts were competent but not inspired. The chemistry between the two leads, rather than the writing, carried the show. In the second season, the show moved to Hawaii, where McCabe became the Honolulu Prosecuting Attorney, and Jake continued as McCabe's chief investigator in the new venue. This was, for me, the high point of the series, with the scripts getting a little sharper and crisper, and the beautiful background a visual delight. In the final season, they moved back to the West Coast to resume their old jobs.

White Hot (NBC, 1991)

A TV-movie, based on Andy Edmonds's **Hot Toddy** (Morrow, 1989), which speculated that the mysterious 1935 death of beautiful screen comedienne Thelma Todd (from inhaling gas fumes while her car idled in her closed up garage) was neither accident nor suicide, but a murder orchestrated by "Lucky" Luciano, with whom Todd was rumored to have been romantically involved. The film presumes that Edmonds was correct, and describes the efforts of fictional DA's Investigator Louis Marsden (Scott Paulin) to prove Thelma Todd (played quite ably by Loni Anderson) was the victim of a deliberate homicide. Marsden is possibly modeled on real-life Los Angeles DA's man Leslie T. White, who had a tendency to tilt at windmills much as Marsden does in this film. As he interviews various people in Miss Todd's life, the story of what led up to her death is told in a series of flashbacks, reminiscent of the investigations conducted by the nameless newsreel reporter in *Citizen Kane*, or by the insurance investigator probing of the murder of the Swede in *The Killers*. Don't take the conclusions as necessarily factual, but enjoy the film as well-done speculative fiction.

Reasonable Doubt (NBC, 1991-93)

When it's discovered that hard-nosed Detective Dickie Cobb (Mark Harmon, in the second of three starring cop roles) is familiar with sign language (both of his parents being deaf), he is assigned, against his protests, as the personal investigator for deaf Assistant DA Tess Kaufman (Oscar-winner Marlee Matlin), in an unnamed Midwestern city that closely resembles Chicago. Very well-done series. In a twist that must have surprised absolutely no one, they develop feelings for each other, despite their different approaches to criminal justice. Am I the only one who thought that the idea of a police detective named "Dick," working in a city that closely resembles Chicago, being romantically drawn to a beautiful

woman named "Tess," couldn't be a mere coincidence? I'm surprised that the folks at the Tribune Syndicate, which owns *Dick Tracy*, didn't raise some hell.

Cagney & Lacey: The Menopause Years (CBS, 1994-96)

Six years after the original *Cagney & Lacey* show left the air, after a seven-season run on CBS, the series was revived for four two-hour "specials" in which the partners were reunited. Since the last episode of the original series, Chris Cagney (Sharon Gless), has been promoted to detective lieutenant, and is now supervising the NYPD's Manhattan DA's Squad. Meanwhile, Mary Beth Lacey (Tyne Daly), retired from the NYPD for several years, finding her family in strained financial circumstances, applies to become a criminal investigator directly employed by the DA's Office. Which means they can work together again. Somewhat heavy-handed treatment of the issues of the day that various episodes dealt with (e.g. illegal immigration, capital punishment), it was, nevertheless, great to see the two actresses back together again as characters we'd all loved during the initial run. The title sounds irreverent, if not deliberately insulting, but that's the title that was used when the four episodes were released on DVD.

Law & Order: Trial by Jury (NBC, 2005-06)

Fourth, and, it must be admitted, least successful of the many shows operating under Dick Wolf's *L&O* umbrella. This one focused on trial preparation. The prosecutors were represented by Bebe Neuwirth and Amy Carlson as Manhattan Assistant DA's Tracy Kibre and Kelly Gaffney. The cop side of the series were DA's investigators. At first Lennie Briscoe, retired from the NYPD to accept a job with the DA's Office, was one of those investigators, but the death of Jerry Ohrbach, who'd played Briscoe for many years on the original *L&O*, made it necessary to replace him. He was succeeded by Kirk Acevedo as DA's

Investigator Hector Salazar and Scott Cohen as Detective Chris Ravell, assigned to the NYPD's Manhattan DA's Squad. Solid show, but, apparently, not sufficiently different enough from the other three *L&O* shows then running to make it stand out. It only lasted 13 episodes.

Chicago Justice (NBC, 2017)

Related to Dick Wolf's *Chicago* shows in sort of the same way that *L&O: Trial by Jury* was to his *L&O* shows. Philip Winchester played Cook County Assistant State's Attorney Peter Stone

(the son of ADA Ben Stone, played by Michael Moriarty on the original *L&O*). His investigators were Antonio Dawson (Jon Seda), who'd left the Chicago PD, and the TV series *Chicago PD* (NBC, 2014 -), to join the investigative staff at the SA's Office, and his new partner, Laura Nagel (Joelle Carter). Carl Weathers (Apollo Creed in the *Rocky* movies), was the Cook County State's Attorney, Mark Jeffries. Quite well-done, but, like *L&O: TBJ*, *Chicago Justice* failed to find an audience and was cancelled after half a season.