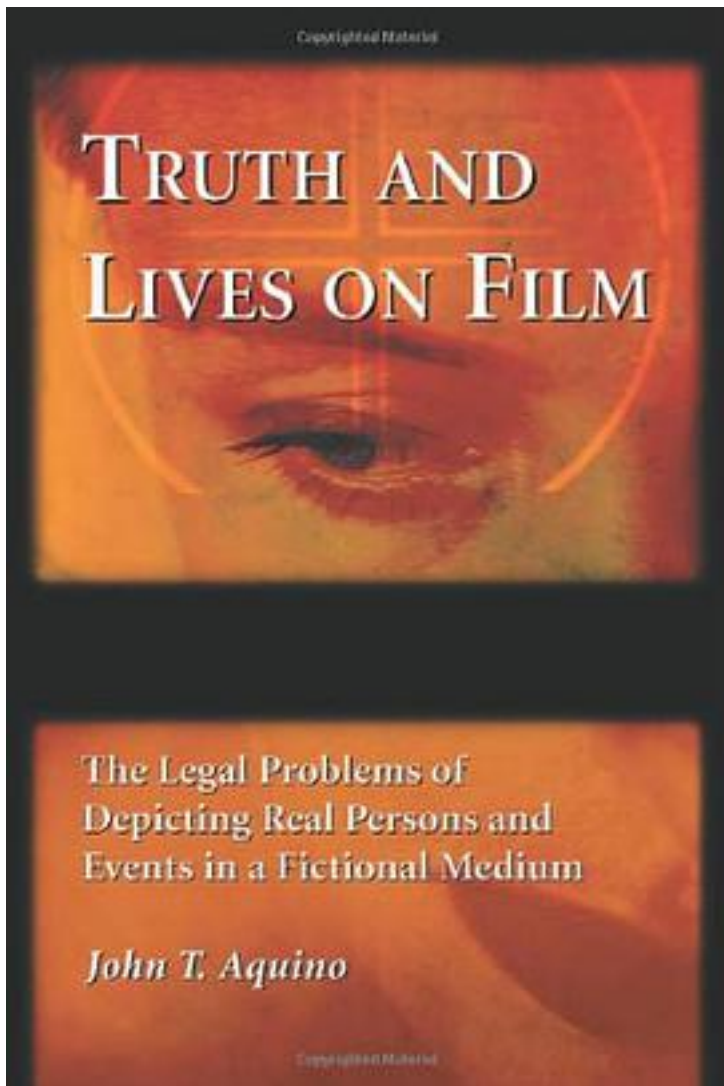


Truth and Lives on Film



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出版者:McFarland & Co Inc Pub

出版时间:2005-1

装帧:Pap

isbn:9780786420445

From the advent of cinema, Hollywood's acquaintance with the unbridled truth has been passing, at best. Nonfiction has always been standard fodder for filmmakers, but rare is the screenwriter who ever met a story that couldn't use a touch of embellishment. As early as the silent film era, lawsuits were filed against movie studios for their fictitious depictions of purportedly real events. The moviemakers claim artistic license; as Picasso said, "Art is a lie that tells the truth." When the lie and the truth become inextricably mixed, the effect on the lives of the people involved can be dramatic, even devastating. The first lawsuit claiming a libelous onscreen portrayal of a real person was filed in 1916, and the debate about filmmakers' responsibilities when depicting real people and events has raged ever since. This examination of fact-based films and the law begins with a history of the legal issues surrounding the fictionalization of real events and people. The court case over *The Perfect Storm*—a film that spawned lawsuits from the families of the people depicted in the film—is then explored in depth. The next chapter analyzes fact versus fiction in 13 courtroom dramas, movies for which court documents provide clear historical records. A chapter devoted to actors so identified with a character that they sought legal acknowledgment of exclusive rights to that fictional persona follows. Notes, a bibliography and an index accompany the text.

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