



Film Copyrights of "To Kill a Mockingbird"

Results

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The Pulitzer Prize-winning novel "To Kill a Mockingbird" is one of the most iconic and widely read stories in the United States. When Burr attorneys Bill Wasden and Mike Strasavich were given the opportunity to serve as local counsel in Mobile, AL in a case about the copyrights for the film adaptation, they were honored to be involved.

A year after the publication of the novel, in 1961, author Harper Lee contracted with film producers Robert Mulligan and Alan J. Pakula for certain production rights to "To Kill a Mockingbird." The film was released in 1962, with Mulligan directing and Pakula producing, and Gregory Peck starring as Atticus Finch. It won three Academy Awards.

Author Harper Lee then sought to terminate the agreement in 2008 and instead institute an agreement granting only certain rights. She again sought to terminate the 1961 agreement in 2015 after publishing the sequel "Go Set a Watchman," which included some of the same characters and themes as "To Kill a Mockingbird."

After Lee passed away in 2016, her estate took over as her representative in the dispute over the movie rights.

In February 2022, a resolution to the dispute moved forward with an arbitration award saying the descendants of Mulligan, Pakula, and Peck have film copyrights to the novel and its sequel, while the author's representatives retain the rights to the printed version of the book, including audiobooks, e-books and play adaptations.

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In August 2022, the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Alabama issued an order upholding the arbitration award. Under the order and judgment, the heirs' film copyrights include rights to the novel's narrative, dialogue, and characters as well as the right to age the characters in any sequel or derivative work.

Burr's Bill Wasden and Mike Strasavich served as local counsel in Mobile and, along with Los Angeles co-counsel Mark S. Lee, of Rimon, P.C., represented the heirs of Mulligan, Pakula, and Peck, as well as their successor business entities.

The case is *Atticus Corporation et al. v. Tonja B. Carter, as Personal Representative of the Estate of Nelle Harper Lee et al.*, case number 1:22-cv-00059, in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Alabama.

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