

*M for Murderer: Fritz Lang's Exploration of the Meaning of Justice*  
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Fritz Lang's 1931 film, *M*, follows the story of a community shocked by the brutal murders of their children and the extent to which they go to pursue justice and capture the murderer, Hans Beckert. Regarded as a German cinematic masterpiece, the film's lack of protagonist, unclear resolution for Beckert, and foreshadowing of Nazi regime political beliefs make Lang's film thought-provoking and intellectually stimulating. Even more, however, Lang's film provides relevant commentary for today's society, as *M* explores how a community's paranoia for the invisible murderer among them can quickly cause its trust to deteriorate and neighbors to turn on each other.

My paper explores how Lang treats the topic of justice by turning criminals into "good guys" and making light of government justice. The citizen's lust for revenge for the murders of their children results in a chaotic Kangaroo court, with one person shouting at the murderer: "This is not a human being." *M* balances between a society's righteous call for justice and a society on edge, obsessed with the crime--yet, has their morbid fascination and media frenzy over the crimes *created* the attention-hungry murderer? With neither the accusers nor the accused being truly innocent, Lang's film ends in a morally gray area with no true answer for justice. Indeed, the film leaves one wondering, is capturing Beckert, the child murderer, and putting him in jail—or sentencing him to death—really justice? And if not, what is?