

# Southfield Public Library

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## *The Lincoln Lawyer by Michael Connelly*

*Discussion Questions used at SPL -- April 2011*

1. The very first line of the book is “there is no client as scary as an innocent man.” Do you think that is true? Why do you think that is? Were any of Mickey’s clients innocent?
2. Did you like Mickey Haller? Was he a “good guy”? Or an opportunist? Did your feelings about him change over the course of the book?
3. What did you think of the way he ran his business, out of his car? Do you think this could really happen?
4. What did you think of Louis Roulet? Did you believe in his innocence? Did Mickey? When did things start to turn for you? What did you think when Mickey started catching him in lies, like his going to law school?
5. When Mickey started putting the pieces together, why didn’t he go to the police or Maggie for help? What do you think he was trying to prove? Was he atoning for his performance as Jesus’ lawyer?
6. Why was Mickey so kind to Gloria, the “lady of the night”? How else did his father influence him?
7. One of his clients, Sam – the Tsunami Svengali – called Mickey a con man. Would you agree with that?
8. Would you hire Mickey as your lawyer?
9. How would you describe his relationship with Maggie McFierce? Why did they divorce in the first place? Where do you think their path will lead?
10. What about his second ex-wife?
11. What is it about Mickey that lets his exes still be friendly – or more! -- with him?
12. What type of father was Mickey? Is he changing?
13. What place in our court system do lawyers like Mickey have? Do they keep the prosecutors honest?

14. How did he feel about his pool of clients – the disadvantaged, the poor, men who knew their path lead to either prison or death? Did he do the best he could for them?
15. Do you think that listening to rap music really could give Mickey a view into the world of his clients?
16. Do you think the police really thought he murdered his friend, Mish, or were they just rousting him because he did represent “bad guys”?
17. Did he sometimes bend the law in representing his clients? Do you think that bending the circumstances, legal or not, is pretty common? What about when he was trying to prove that Roulet was the murderer? Did the end justify the means?
18. The case of Jesus Menendez was a turning point for Mickey – he took it for the publicity, knowing he wouldn’t get paid but that having his name out there would lead to more clients. Do you think he did the best he could have done for Jesus?
19. Jesus asked him (p218) why he never asked him if he committed the crime. Do you think lawyers should ask that question? Would it make a difference in how they would defend someone?
20. Mickey had defended 11 murderers and none were on death row. . .He thought that was a good record. . . would you agree?
21. Did this book give you a new look at the life of criminal defense lawyers? What about the court system in general? Do you think it was realistic or just a good story?
22. Do we have anybody in our area that you could compare him to? Geoffrey Feiger? Would you hire him for your lawyer?
23. Who’s seen the movie? How did you think it stacked up to the book? How did Matthew McConaughey do in his portrayal of Mickey?

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## *General Discussion Questions*

- For the person who chose the book – What made you want to read it? What made you pick it for the book club? Did it live up to your expectations?
  - How is the book structured? First person? Third person? Flashbacks? Narrative devices? Do you think the author did a good job with it?
  - How would you describe the author’s writing style? Concise? Flowery? How is language used in this book? Read aloud a passage that really struck you. How does that passage relate to the book as a whole?
  - How effective is the author’s use of plot twists? Were you able to predict certain things before they happened? Did the author keep you guessing until the end?
  - Did the book hold your interest?
  - How important is the setting to the story? Did you feel like you were somewhere else? Did the time setting make a difference in the story? Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the setting and time placement?
  - Which is stronger in the book – the characters or the plots?
  - Would you recommend this book to someone else? Why? And to whom?
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## *The Lincoln Lawyer*

### *Questions from Michael Connelly's webpage*

<http://www.michaelconnelly.com/novels/thelincolnlawyer/readingguide/>

1. *"There is no client as scary as an innocent man."*

This is the very first line of the book, spoken by J. Michael Haller, a famous criminal defense attorney and the father of Mickey Haller, the main character in *The Lincoln Lawyer*. Did you understand what this meant? Why would an innocent man scare an attorney?

2. *"Don't do the crime if you can't pay for my time."*

When we are first introduced to Mickey Haller, we find out that he is a criminal defense attorney who knows how to play all the angles. He has been in trouble with the California Bar. His clients are gang members, drug dealers, prostitutes and con men. He does his best for his clients as long as they can pay his bill. He seems to be the kind of lawyer that we all love to hate. How did you feel about this character when you first began reading about him?

3. *"I don't know many people who have ex-wives who still like them."*

Later we find out that Mickey has two ex-wives, both of whom are still close to him. One even works for him. He has business associates that are also loyal longtime friends. He has longtime clients who he continues to work for, even when they can't pay him. What does this reveal about his character? Did your feelings toward him as a character change the more you read about him?

4. *"There was nothing about the law that I cherished anymore."*

Mickey says that: "the law was not about truth. It was about negotiation, amelioration, manipulation. I didn't deal in guilt and innocence because everybody was guilty. Of something." It seems like a very cynical statement. Yet at the same time, Mickey does believe in a justice system based on checks and balances. He feels like he is an important cog in the wheel and that everybody is owed a right to defend themselves. Do you agree with Mickey's view of the law and the justice system? Would you describe him as a cynic or a realist? Can you understand the value of defense attorneys within our legal system? Did this book change your opinion of the justice system?

5. *"A lot of these new people just don't get it."*

Mickey and his ex-wife, deputy district attorney Maggie McPherson, appear to have a different view of the law. To her it is a calling and about justice. She views what he does as sleazy. Mickey says that her calling may have cost them their marriage. They seem to love each other but can you understand why their marriage didn't work? Do you think they will end up together again?

6. *"He looks like a babe in the woods."*

What was your initial impression of Louis Ross Roulet? Did you think he was innocent or guilty? How did your feelings change for him as you read the book?

7. *“I was always worried that I might not recognize innocence.”*

Roulet’s defense was based on the theory that Reggie Campo was after his money and that he was set up. We are meant to believe that she allowed herself to be severely beaten in order to score a big payoff. Did you believe this at first? Is our society so litigious that we could easily believe that someone would do that?

8. *“Any case, Anytime, Anywhere.”*

Did you respect Mickey’s skill as an attorney and his ability to work within and use the justice system?

9. *“He grew up knowing he was going.”*

Many of Mickey’s clients were drug dealers who viewed prison as an anticipated part of life. Mickey’s job was to get them the best deal possible. He felt like these young men never had a shot at anything but thug life. He listened to rap music as a way of understanding their lives. Do you think Mickey felt that he had a calling too — to work for people that he views as the underdog? Did his attitude surprise you?

10. *“What’s the difference between a catfish and a defense attorney?”*

Why are lawyer jokes so commonplace and acceptable? Mickey said “They always blame the lawyer for making a living,” but with clients like drug dealers, prostitutes and con men, can you see why Mickey would be viewed as a pariah by many people?

11. *“By then the Titanic had already left the dock.”*

Mickey represented Jesus Menendez in what appeared to be a no-win case. Jesus couldn’t pay him anything but Mickey knew that he would be paid in publicity, which would help him get other clients. Jesus’ claims of innocence didn’t matter. Mickey didn’t even try to investigate the case further. He simply was there to get the best deal for his client. Was Mickey’s lack of effort simply because Jesus couldn’t pay for a good defense or was the evidence available at the time too overwhelming? Do you think you can get a good defense without money?

12. *“I had been presented with innocence but I had not seen it or grasped it.”*

At the time, Mickey viewed Jesus’ case as hopeless. The evidence was overwhelming and Mickey came on board the case late. If they had gone to trial and lost Jesus might have been sentenced to death. He admitted to taking the case for the publicity value only. Given the circumstances, do you think Mickey was right to feel guilty about Jesus?

13. *“There is no trap so deadly as the one you set for yourself.”*

Mickey was trying to insure that Raul’s murderer would be caught, that Jesus Menendez would be released, and that Louis Ross Roulet would go to prison — all while saving his own law practice. But by doing this all on his own he put his life and the lives of others in jeopardy. Did you understand why Mickey chose to not directly get the police involved?

14. *“I traded evil for innocence.”*

Mickey used questionable ways to make sure that justice was served. He tampered with a witness (Corliss); he lied to his client and to the police; he withheld information. Do you think the end justified his actions?