

## Movie Titles that begin with "U"

**The Unbearable Weight of Massive Talent \* Unbreakable \* Unbroken \* Uncle Frank \* Uncut Gems \* Undeclared 2012 & 2020 \* Under The Same Moon \* Under The Tuscan Sun \* Unfaithful \* An Unfinished Life \* Unfinished Song \* Unfrosted \* United 93 \* The United States vs. Billie Holiday \* Unknown \* Unstoppable \* Up \* Up In The Air \* Up The Yangtze \* The Upside \* The Upside of Anger \* The U.S. vs. John Lennon**

**THE UNBEARABLE WEIGHT OF MASSIVE TALENT:** 2022 (Barb & I saw this film at a local theater) Nicolas Cage stars as Nick Cage in a wildly creative action-comedy. Drawing on the Oscar-winner's larger-than-life persona, the filmmakers wisely assume that nobody can play Nick Cage better than the legend himself. What you have here is essentially a buddy action comedy in which Cage plays an actor whose career is fading and who finds himself in massive debt. The actor reluctantly agrees to attend the birthday party of an eccentric billionaire fan (brilliantly played by Pedro Pascal) who offers Cage \$1 million to show up at his party and hopefully read his movie script. Unsurprisingly, things get a little out of hand. OK, a lot out of hand. This sounds like it could turn into a heavy movie, but it doesn't. It's a fun one. It is a loving tribute to Cage's hair-trigger intensity. It earned 89% out of 131 reviews on the Rotten Tomato Tomatometer. The dramatic and fictionalized film plunges the iconic actor into an amusingly preposterous scenario in which he must work with the CIA to stop a Cage superfan who may also be the ruthless head of a cartel. It's a rip-roaring good time that rightfully instills as much Cage into its 1h 46m running time as is humanly possible. Cage is credited twice in the end titles: under his own name Nicolas Cage, playing "Nick Cage", and also under the name "Nicolas Kim Coppola," his real birth name, playing "Nicky" (Cage's alter ego). Cage channels his most iconic and beloved on-screen characters in order to save himself and his loved ones in the movie. With a 40 year film career, the award-winning actor takes on the role of a lifetime. If you are a Nick Cage enthusiast, it is a "must see" film. Nicolas Cage deserves a film celebrating his career. In my opinion it is a career worth celebrating. **GRADE B+**

**UNBREAKABLE:** We saw this film with John Clark, Fort Collins, CO, and we all had the same reaction: Unbearably slow, unremittingly gloomy, and uniformly uninteresting. What a disappointment. We all liked the eerie mystery of M. Night Shyamalan's first feature--The Sixth Sense, but this film utterly failed to work its magic on us. I'm getting tired of the trend toward shooting scenes either in half-light or in the rain. It's depressing! Bruce Willis is David Dunne, a University Security Guard who is the only survivor of a terrible train crash. What's more, he survived without a scratch. Samuel L. Jackson is Elijah Price, a man born with brittle-bone disease who has spent his life looking for someone at the opposite end of the spectrum--someone who is unbreakable. It is inevitable that the two men meet. Robin Wright is Megan Dunne; the female half of the Dunne's troubled marriage. She looks incredibly worn and tired here. One reviewer commented that she looks like she's a "refugee from Requiem for A Dream." We seem to be at odds with many critics on this film. Those who praise the film find it "somberly fantastic" and "quietly intriguing." We do agree with a Raleigh N.C. reviewer who said "The film's poky pace may frustrate some moviegoers -- at times it moves so deliberately that the payoffs hardly seem worth the wait." (They weren't worth the wait!) I don't often agree with Mr. Cranky, but I liked his opening line: "I swear, if M. Night Shyamalan makes his movies go any slower, we're going to watch them and start moving back in time." Not only is the action painfully slow, but the actors all speak as though they are sedated. There is a young boy in this picture who doesn't see any dead people, but is in a lot of scenes with half-dead people. (Thanks to John for that observation.) Unbreakable has a running time of 107 minutes. It seemed like three hours to us. **GRADE: C-/D**

**UNBROKEN:** (2014) While waiting for this movie to open in our local theaters, Barbara and I wondered if it could possibly be as compelling and uplifting as the book and the unbelievable true story on which it is based. When a book is truly inspirational, it is difficult, if not impossible, for a film to live up to expectations. Academy Award winner Angelina Jolie directed and produced the film telling the story of Louis "Louie" Zamperini, a former Olympic distance runner who served as a bombardier on a B-24 in WWII. He miraculously survived a crash in the Pacific Ocean and 47 days on a raft early in 1943 only to be captured by the Japanese and spend the next two years in a series of brutal prison camps. It is a grueling test of endurance between a weakened Louie Zamperini and a sadistic commandant who takes a personal interest in making his life a living hell. The relentless torture is broken only occasionally by flashbacks to Louie's youth. How could a true story about the resilient power of the human spirit brought to the screen by one of the most glamorous and publicized movie stars on earth and a screenplay helped along by the famous Coen brothers who brought us *Fargo* and *No Country for Old Men* not be great? Sadly our brains have become saturated with fictional and true WWII stories and if a film doesn't blow us away, we file it in with countless war film memories. It is a good film with a story that deserves our attention. Unfortunately it will probably be lost in a long list of WWII films and biopics. If you decide to see this film, be sure to stay through the ending credits and learn even more about a man that will make your heart soar. If you decide not to see the film, please consider reading Laura Hillenbrand's gripping book by the same title. **GRADE B**

**UNCLE FRANK** (2020 on Amazon Prime): "In 1973, when Frank and his 18-year-old niece Beth take a road trip from Manhattan to Creekville, South Carolina, for the family patriarch's funeral, they're unexpectedly joined by Frank's lover, Walid." That is the one sentence description of the movie that appears on IMDb, but it doesn't begin to describe the excellent performances by a cast of great actors. Paul Bettany is Uncle Frank, the only one who looked 14-year-old Betty in the eye and told her to be herself. Fast-forward four years, and Beth is enrolled in New York University where her uncle teaches literature. At a party, she learns that her uncle is gay and that he has lived with Walid (Peter Macdissi) for 10 years. Macdissi is wonderful, and his warm authenticity is, as one critic put it, "crucial to the film's success." I would add that Sophia Lillis who plays Beth with charm and grace is also crucial. The cast includes, Margo Martindale as Frank's mother, Steven Root as his unforgiving father, and Steve Zahn and Judy Greer as his brother and sister-in-law. That is a cast that will make you want to believe the ending, even if it seems a bit too pat. Several critics mentioned Bettany's convincing performance and we agree with them. That is why Gary thought that one scene toward the end was uncharacteristic for Bettany's Frank. He thought that Alan Ball (*American Beauty* and *Six Feet Under*), who both wrote and directed the movie, should have rewritten that one scene. But we liked the message of acceptance that the well-acted *Uncle Frank* enthusiastically delivered. **GRADE B+**

**UNCUT GEMS:** (2019) Most critics loved this film. It stars Adam Sandler who when given the right material e.g. *Spanglish (2004)*, is a terrific actor. *Uncut Gems* suits him, but both Barbara and I were less than pleased with the screenplay and direction. The film is directed co-written by the Safdie brothers, Joshua and Benjamin, American independent filmmakers who made home movies when they were kids and frequently collaborate as adults. They deliver a high-intensity heart-racing journey with a pace that never lets up. It may have been the relentless pace and the technique of having several actors delivering lines on top of each other that two octogenarians grew quickly tired of. Sandler plays Howard, a jeweler whose compulsive gambling habit has turned his life into a series of bets, each raising the stakes higher than the last. Also featured is NBA retired basketball star Kevin Garnett playing a fictionalized version of himself in his feature film debut. Setting the story in 2012 in New York City allows Garnett to fit into a time frame when he played a power forward with the Boston Celtics. His role is crucial to the story and Garnett is quite good at playing himself. The movie captures the hopelessness of living life on the edge and even though we were not thrilled with the film, I am quite sure it will advance the careers of Sandler and the Safdie brothers. **GRADE B-**

**UNDEFEATED:** (2012) Winning an Academy Award, as this film did, usually means a film will be widely viewed. But that doesn't apply to the Best Documentary Feature category. Of the five films nominated this year, this is the only one Barbara and I had an opportunity to see, and it only was shown in one local theater **after** it won the award. This is an inspiring film on the Manassas Tigers, an underdog football team in a severely underfunded high school football program in a struggling school. But to call this a football movie would be misleading and inaccurate. And it wouldn't do justice to an incredible volunteer coach who teaches kids from a violent inner-city neighborhood lessons desperately needed but rarely taught. The filmmakers had astonishing access to coach Bill Courtney and his incredible players. They don't act real, they are real. We hope you have an opportunity to see **Undeclared**. **GRADE A- Note:** If you decide to search for this film, be warned that there is a film about Sarah Palin with the same title. It didn't win an Oscar.

**UNDEFEATED** (2020 on Netflix): After watching *Friday Night Lights* for 5 seasons, Gary and I decided to watch a real high school football team. The coach of the Manassas High School in North Memphis, TN is Bill Courtney. He isn't as pretty as Eric Taylor (Kyle Chandler) but he is one hell of the football coach, and he is real. Like Taylor, he cares about his players and wants them to succeed in life as well as on the football team. Since its founding in 1899, Manassas has never won a playoff game. In 2009 they seem to have a chance to break their school's 110-year losing streak. Nurturing his players and teaching them to think like a team and to never quit, Coach Courtney has a positive effect on these kids from an inner-city high school. We agree with the UK critic who said, "You'd have to find heroic reserves of cynicism not to care at all about the precarious fortunes of these unformed bruisers." Like their coach, we did care about them and believe they are truly undefeated. **GRADE A**

**UNDER THE SAME MOON:** It would be a hard heart that wasn't moved by this mother and son reunion movie. It tells the story of nine-year-old Carlitos, whose mother left Mexico for the US when he was just five. For the past four years Rosario has been working two jobs in order get legal papers so that she can bring Carlitos to Los Angeles. Meanwhile, she phones him every Sunday morning and sends \$300 a month to her mother who is caring for Carlitos. When his grandmother dies, the youngster decides it's time to go to Los Angeles and find his mother. How he gets there and the characters he meets along the way make for quite an adventure. Scenes of Carlitos on his journey alternate with scenes of Rosario in Los Angeles. Through some miraculous coincidences, the movie does end happily. Young Adrian Alonso is impressive as Carlito and Kate Del Castillo is a lovely and sympathetic Rosario. This film explores the difficult situation of illegal immigration and uses a human example to pose the question, What should be done? Owen Gleiberman, (who gave the film an A-) said in his EW Weekly review of the film that it's ending was so touching "it could make Lou Dobbs cry." Other critical comments have ranged from "A heart-ripping audience pleaser..." to "...manipulative, saccharin..." We liked this heart-warming film and admit to being choked up at the ending. The movie is in Spanish with English subtitles. **GRADE B**

**UNDER THE TUSCAN SUN:** The only similarity between Frances Mayes' book, *Under The Tuscan Sun*, and this movie is that the heroine buys a dilapidated Tuscan villa named Bramasole. That's about it. Oh yes, the Frances in the movie was also a teacher. The screenwriter (Audry Wells) saw fit to completely change the rest of the story. She transformed the fifty-something Mayes into a newly divorced single woman of 35 who moves permanently to Tuscany and spends a lot of her time looking for a man. (The real Mayes only spends summers at Bramasole and she spends her time renovating and cooking.) We were very disappointed in this film. Stephen Hunter, reviewer for the *Washington Post*, said "the most disappointed viewers of this film are likely to be those who loved the book; they will feel not just betrayed but shafted." That sums it up for me. Diane Lane is as beautiful and appealing as ever, but although the writer tried to make a charming film the result is several quarts low on charm. If you want to see a movie about Tuscany, rent the far superior *Enchanted April*. This film consists of a disjointed bunch of scenes and cliches that probably looked good on paper but never flow together as a cohesive whole. In spite of some gorgeous views of the Tuscany countryside, I'm sorry to say that we thought the movie was dull. The supporting actors are all capable, but only one of them, the realtor who sold Bramasole to Frances, captured our interest. The rest were eminently forgettable. Because we like Diane Lane, we give this film a C. (And Gary thinks that may be overly generous.)

**UNFAITHFUL:** We have always admired Diane Lane and we hope that this film will increase her visibility. (See Video Recommendations) She is excellent here as Connie Sumner, a housewife who starts an affair with a handsome book dealer. Why she risks her "perfect" life with a doting husband and a bright articulate 8-year-old son has no easy answer. However, Lane's skillful acting helped us understand how the excitement and passion of an illicit affair might seduce Connie. Richard Gere plays against type here as a faintly frumpy, conservative business owner who is shocked when he discovers his wife's duplicity. He is eminently believable. The screenplay is based on a script by Claude Chabrol, and the writing is superior. I liked the unpredictability of the story line, and the ambiguous ending was perfect. The handsome stranger is Olivier Martinez, who played the Cuban poet, Reinaldo Arenas, in *Before Night Falls*. Erik Per Sullivan, who played Fuzzy in *The Cider House Rules*, is very good as the young Charlie Sumner. Be prepared for some graphic sex scenes. We didn't put this film in the "A" category because our reaction to it was intellectual rather than emotional. But it is a solid **GRADE B+**

**AN UNFINISHED LIFE:** (2005 Release seen on Video) Robert Redford is good as a crusty, bitter Wyoming rancher who can't get over his son's death in a car accident. A car driven by his daughter-in-law, Jennifer Lopez. When the daughter-in-law and granddaughter

show up at his ranch, on the run from an abusive boyfriend, he is less than welcoming. Morgan Freeman is his partner in the ranch. We give this one a **THUMBS UP**.

**UNFINISHED SONG:** (2012) It is shamelessly sentimental, completely manipulative and totally predictable but Vanessa Redgrave and Terence Stamp manage to pull it off. Or, as Stephen Holden of the *NY Times* wrote, "It may be hokum, but it gets to you." And it did get to us, mostly because of the superior acting skills of all concerned. Stamp plays Arthur, a life-long grouch who genuinely loves Marion, his dying wife, the ever-lovely Redgrave. She is an enthusiastic member of a community chorus called the OAP--Old Age Pensioners. Arthur thinks it's silly but dutifully takes her there for rehearsals, waiting outside until it's over. Arthur also loves his granddaughter but, as he confesses to the OAP director (Gemma Aterton), "my son and I have never gotten along." From the beginning of the movie you know that Marion will die, Arthur will join the chorus and in doing so, will repair his relationship with his son. But in the end, you find yourself reaching for the Kleenex. I must admit, that it's getting harder and harder to see movies about old people dying or getting dementia, but with the recent success of *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, and with the aging of the baby-boomers, I expect we'll see more and more of them. In fact, we recently saw a trailer for another independent film, titled *Still Mine*, with James Cromwell and Geneviève Bujold. I know we won't be able to resist it. **GRADE B-**

**UNFROSTED 2024** (Available for streaming on Netflix) In his feature directorial debut, Jerry Seinfeld depicts an absurd competition, as dueling cereal companies race to create the Pop-Tart. The film stars an ensemble cast that includes Seinfeld, Melissa McCarthy, Jim Gaffigan, Hugh Grant, Amy Schumer, Jon Hamm, and several others who must be on Seinfeld's rolodex. In 1963 Michigan, business rivals Kellogg's and Post compete to create a cake that could change breakfast forever. Barbara and I have always liked Jerry Seinfeld, so a film he directed, co-wrote and stars in left us waiting for the opening with high expectations. How could a comedy starring some of the funniest people on the planet miss? Well, one critic among many that hated the film put it this way: *Unfrosted is the cinematic equivalent of a kid mixing every cereal from his parents' cupboard into a giant salad bowl with the hope that a splash of milk will magically blend the various flavors into something palatable.* For us **it didn't**. To be fair, Barb laughed out loud two or three times and I chuckled maybe once or twice. It's impossible to assemble this much comedic talent and not get a bullseye occasionally, yet the hit-to-miss ratio favored the latter far too much. On Rotten Tomatoes based on 66 reviews, the film scored 42% from critics and based on 100 audience viewings scored 48%. One even less kind critic wrote, *Unfrosted is one of the worst films of the decade so far.* I guess my feeling about the film is closer to a kind but not enthusiastic critic who wrote, *Unfrosted is sweet and colorful, yet it's ultimately an empty experience that may leave the consumer feeling pangs of regret.* **GRADE C-**

**UNITED 93:** This is a terrific movie. It plays more like a documentary, and you really feel you are on the doomed plane. Probably that's because the director didn't script the dialogue. It's all improvised, based on recorded flight information or records of phone calls made by the passengers. Also, because the movie set plane moved the same as Flight 93, thanks to hydraulics and a computer programmed from details provided by the 9/11 Commission. The suspense and drama of the film are not at all diminished by knowing the ending. It is riveting. And incredibly moving. The actors playing the Flight 93 heroes are relatively unknown, so they all seem like real people. We did recognize one actor. Christian Clemenson portrays Thomas E. Burnett, Jr. who helped organize a revolt against the terrorists. We recognized him from a reoccurring role he has on TV's *Boston Legal*. (We've also learned that, as a boy, he carried newspapers in Des Moines, IA, as did Gary.) We think everyone should see this remarkable film. **GRADE A**

**UNITED STATES VS BILLY HOLIDAY:** 2021 (Available for streaming on Hulu). Billie Holiday was one of the greatest jazz singers from the 1930s to the '50s. Her soulful, unique singing voice made her a superstar of her time. She is, perhaps, best known for her 1939 recording of "Strange Fruit" one of America's earliest and most shocking protest songs. It is a haunting and horrifying description of the lynching of black Americans with lyrics that compare the victims to the fruit of trees. Following are a few graphic lines from that famous song:

*Southern trees bear a strange fruit  
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root  
Black bodies swingin' in the Southern breeze  
Strange fruit hangin' from the poplar trees*

The Hulu film makes the case that the Feds investigating the vocalist's heroin abuse really just wanted to silence her from singing "Strange Fruit, which the FBI saw as incendiary. The song has been called "a declaration" and "the beginning of the civil rights movement". Our history with human rights has not been a pretty one. "In 1937 a bill to finally ban the lynching of African-Americans was considered by the Senate. IT DID NOT PASS. In February 2020, the Emmet Till Anti-lynching act was considered by the Senate. IT HAS YET TO PASS. Barbara and I were impressed by the work of Andra Day, who plays Billy Holiday. We wanted to love this film, but like many critics (It received only 56% on the *Tomatometer*) we were hoping for more from such a powerful story and talented cast. I'm trying to remember, but I don't think there was a shred of humor or lightheartedness in the film. Barb thinks, and I have to agree, that the director, Lee Daniels, would have had a better film if he had tightened it to a running time of 1 hour 45 min instead of 2 hours 10 min. **GRADE B**

**UNKNOWN:** I think that critics who don't like this film because the plot has holes are missing the point. The point of stories like these is to provide an excuse for car chases, explosions and fist fights. It's all about the action, not the story. The story on this movie does have some holes, and the car chases are unbelievable in the extreme, but I thought the explanation at the end was quite creative. Liam Neeson is very good at this kind of thing: he's big, tough and still likeable and sympathetic. Diane Krueger (*Inglorious Basterds*) is very good as the woman who helps him as he tries to figure out why his identity has been stolen. Neeson travels to Berlin with his wife (January Jones) for a Biotech Conference. Arriving at their hotel, he realizes that his briefcase was accidentally left at the airport and he rushes back to retrieve it. On the trip, the cab he is riding in has an accident. Krueger is the cabbie (now that is hard to believe) and she saves his life. When he wakes from a four-day comma, no one, including his wife seems to know who he is, but people seem to be trying to kill him. With Krueger's help, he manages to evade the killers and eventually the mystery is solved, sort of. It certainly isn't the worst thriller we've ever seen, but it isn't one of the best, either. Jones, famous for her role in TV's *Madmen* is the same here. In fact, she's the same every time I've seen her. I think she was lucky to find a TV role that hides her lack of acting ability. This movie doesn't hide it. **GRADE B-**

**UNSTOPPABLE:** With sixteen films to his credit, iconic director Tony Scott knows the action/thriller genre well and he knows trains. His last film was *The Taking of Pelham 1 2 3*. A perfect storm of human error and bad luck merge to bring us a runaway train with a wide open throttle and bad breaks carrying enough combustible toxic goo and poisonous gas to wipe out a small city. Add to the mix a trainload of schoolchildren up ahead on the same track. One reviewer suggested that all the filmmakers resisted was hiring Taylor Swift for a cameo as a cancer patient tied to the tracks. It does sound like an unlikely scenario, but it was inspired by true events that took place in Ohio in 2001. Danzel Washington plays a veteran engineer nearing retirement and Cris Pine plays an inexperienced conductor. Washington and Pine are, of course, fantastic and an important supporting role is ably filled by Rosario Dawson. The train is not listed among the credits, but it was fantastic too. Since there are practical limits to how long one can pump adrenaline and dig one's fingernails into the arm rests Tony Scott wisely brought his film to a close after a 95 minute thrill ride. Both Barbara and I liked the film, but I rated it marginally higher. **GRADE B+/B**

**UP:** Although we tend to avoid animated films, this one got such glowing reviews we decided to see it. *Up* is a comedy adventure about 78-year-old balloon salesman Carl Fredricksen, who finally fulfills his lifelong dream of a great adventure when he ties thousands of balloons to his house and flies away to the wilds of South America. The first part of the film tells Carl and Ellie's love story. The two meet as children when they realize they share the same dream of being explorers. The next part is told without dialogue: We see Ellie and Carl marry, buy a fixer-upper house, share both happiness and pain, and grow old. The rest of the film is the story of Carl's life after Ellie. He refuses to sell his home even though new high-rise buildings are going up all around him. When threatened with removal to a nursing home, he packs up and, with the help of hundreds of helium balloons, sails away on an adventure. He finds adventure and much more. The movie was directed by Pete Docter, who also directed *Monsters, Inc.*, wrote *Toy Story* and was a co-writer on *WALL-E*. The animation is remarkable and the characters delightful. The little ones in the audience enjoyed the South American adventure, complete with a large colorful bird and talking dogs. I was touched by the human story and entertained by the wild adventure. Gary was a bit less engaged. I think that for me, the film deserves a B+; Gary believes the it was well-done, but he has difficulty with animated films, except for *Shrek*, and declines to give it a grade. **GRADE B+**

**UP IN THE AIR:** I think we went to this movie with too high expectations. Our local reviewer gave it 5 stars, and most critics were very enthusiastic. We liked it, but for us it wasn't an "A" movie. It is, however, the perfect movie for these economic times, since it is about a corporate hatchet man who fires people for executives who are too wimpy to do it themselves. It is also about modern communication methods that too often prevent any real communication from taking place. Ryan Bingham (George Clooney) travels about 350,000 miles a year and his one goal in life is to reach 10 million miles. He has flying down to a science. He loves his life and his only regret is that last year he had to spend over 40 days at home—in Omaha. He has no ties, no commitments to anyone and that's exactly the way he likes it. What's more, he has met the woman of his dreams, a sort of female version of himself, played by the captivating Vera Farmiga. Imagine his dismay when his boss hires Natalie, a young whiz kid who has developed an inter-active video conferencing method that will allow Ryan and his colleagues to fire people without leaving home. Without flying anywhere! He is pressured to take Natalie on the road with him so that she can experience the business first-hand, and the trip changes both of them. Newcomer Anna Kendrick is Natalie, and she holds her own with the ever-charming, ever handsome Clooney. That Clooney charm may be part of the problem we had with the movie. I understand that in the book the protagonist is an unremitting loner. The director warmed Bingham up to make him more palatable for moviegoers and possibly to fit Clooney better. As Michael Phillips said in his review, *It (the film) is actively impossible to dislike, even when its protagonist is doing nominally dislikable things*. But while that "warming-up" probably made us like the movie better, it does take some of the bite out of the story. What's more, it made Bingham's "moving-is-living" speech seem too harsh. We did like the technique of focusing on the faces of the people being fired which gave the movie the feeling of a documentary. The technique also provided some nice cameo performances. J.K. Simmons was especially good. Gary says B, but I think it deserves a B+. **GRADE B**

**UP THE YANGTZE:** When the Three Gorges Dam is completed in 2011 it will hold the title of the world's largest hydroelectric dam, measuring more than a mile in width and 600 feet in height. Ultimately, 4 million people will be displaced from their homes and moved to concrete apartments that have all the charm of a cell. Canadian director Yung Chang illustrates this gigantic upheaval in his documentary by focusing on two young people working on a luxury Yangtze River cruise ship: Shy and insecure Yu Shui, who wants to go to high school but her parents are too poor to send her, and handsome, cocky Chen Bo, from a middle-class family. They are given English names and counseled not to call guests old or fat, or discuss anything political. Yung Chang's family lives in a dilapidated shack on the edge of the river. They have little money, but they do have enough land to grow their own vegetables, and, though poor, they eat well. One of the most memorable scenes in the documentary consists of time-lapse photos of their house being swallowed up by the river. China would like you to think that all relocatees are treated equally—given a color TV and air conditioning—but that is not the case. Director Chang makes the point in a short but devastating scene in which a shopkeeper breaks down and weeps as he talks of being beaten when he was relocated because he couldn't pay a bribe. He says, "It's hard being a human, but being a common person in China is even more difficult." One reviewer called the film a "lovely, unhurried documentary," but for us, it was simply slow—very slow. Another review in *The Boston Globe* referred to the film as "haunting," and the foggy scenes of the river, taken in the very early morning or at dusk, certainly were haunting. They were also rather dreary, but perhaps that is exactly what the filmmaker intended. When we took our trip down the Yangtze, the weather was beautiful and the days were sunny and bright. There was no sunshine in this film, but again, perhaps that was intentional. Rene Rodriguez said, in her review in the Miami Herald, that *Up The Yangtze's* "main tone is one of a melancholy mournfulness for the unimaginable scope of what is soon to be lost, and never regained, in the name of progress." We can agree with that, but, because we both had trouble staying awake, we can't grade it high than—**GRADE C**

**THE UPSIDE:** (2017/2019) When we saw *The Intouchables* in 2011, we began our review with this sentence: *This may not be a great movie, but it certainly is an enjoyable and entertaining one*. That is absolutely true of the Hollywood remake, *The Upside*. Brian Cranston plays the part of Phillip Lacasse a wealthy quadriplegic and Kevin Hart plays the part of Dell Scott the unlikely caregiver. The two actors have marvelous chemistry and that is the reason that audiences rate the movie much higher than do the critics. Critics are reluctant to give high grades to any film that is sentimental, predictable and somewhat manipulative of our emotions, although they were kinder to the French movie. Gary and I didn't feel a bit manipulated by this entertaining, warm and funny movie. We thought the

subplot about Dell Scott and his family was a welcome addition. One short but pivotal scene involved the always terrific Julianna Margulies. Nicole Kidman played Phillip's uptight but caring business manager. Both movies are inspired by the true story of Philippe Pozzo di Borgo and his French-Algerian caregiver Abdel Sellou. Cranston is one of our best actors and Hart surprised us with his acting chops. We were delighted by ***The Upside***. **GRADE B+**

(We've put the memoir written by Abdel Sellou, titled *You Changed My Life*, on hold at our digital library.)

**THE UPSIDE OF ANGER:** (2005) We first saw Joan Allen when she was working by day as a secretary in Chicago and appearing at night on the Steppenwolf stage. We were impressed with her then and are even more impressed with her now. She gives a remarkable performance here as Terry Wolfmeyer, a deserted wife and the mother of four daughters ("One of them hates me and the two or three are working on it"). Her anger at her husband, who, she believes, has moved to Sweden with his young assistant, drives her to drink and into the arms of a neighbor and family friend, Denny Davies. Davies (Kevin Costner) is a paunchy, alcoholic ex-baseball star who has a local sports talk show and, in his spare time, autographs baseballs to sell at fan conventions. Costner is wonderful in the role and the two actors are splendid together. Both create real people who are flawed and exasperating, but still likeable. They are greatly aided in this film by an intelligent and articulate script that never settles for clichés. Mike Binder, the writer/director, also appears as Shep Goodman, the producer of Davies' radio show. He distinguishes himself in all three capacities. The four actresses who play Terry's daughters are simply perfect. (Alicia Witt, Erica Christensen, Kerri Russell, Evan Rachel Wood) The ending caused us a bit of concern. Gary felt that it raised too many questions and weakened an otherwise A movie. The critics are divided as to the ending's impact on the movie. A.O. Scott in the New York Times called the ending "an utter catastrophe") and Joe Morgenstern in the Wall Street Journal said it was "a cheat." However, Roger Ebert feels that "without the ending, ***The Upside of Anger*** is a wonderfully made comedy of domestic manners. With it, the movie becomes larger and deeper. When life plays a joke on you, it can have a really rotten sense of humor." We'll be interested in your reactions. We decided on a grade of A-. **GRADE A-**

**THE U.S. vs JOHN LENNON:** Barbara and I viewed two films today, so I get to review the documentary that almost no one will see. That is unfortunate because this is a well-made and powerful documentary that deserves to be seen. The film focuses on John Lennon's life from 1966 to 1976 and only briefly refers to his murder in 1980. The film is sympathetic to Lennon and his widow Yoko Ono, who I am told granted filmmakers unprecedented access to her archives. It is also loaded with testimony and talking heads including Walter Cronkite, Noam Chomsky, Gore Vidal, John Dean, Gordon Liddy and many others. As you would expect, many of John's songs are included. His celebrity coupled with his anti Vietnam War stance and his criticism of the Nixon administration brought down the wrath of the government and this struggle makes up most of the documentary. So if you blanch at any criticism of J. Edgar Hoover or the Nixon administration, I guess you will not be seeing ***The U.S Vs John Lennon***. We both liked it and give it a grade of B+. **GRADE B+**