



My Cup Spillith Over...Again

by [Jessica S. Grigsby](#) on 01/27/11

In what is often referred to as the bane of my professional existence as a plaintiff's lawyer, the infamous McDonalds case has resurfaced again. Since it inspired the title of my entire blog, I thought I should spotlight its latest phoenix-like rise. It comes back into the watchful eye of popular culture now in a different light and this time appearing on the big screen. Producer and lawyer, Susan Saladoff, just debuted her film, *Hot Coffee*, at the Sundance Film Festival.

The film chronicles the motivations behind cooperate America's divisive campaign to turn one woman's painful ordeal into a sound-bite of mockery, absurdity, and a call for tort-reform. Few people know the story of the case in its entirety – for example, despite an eight day hospitalization with extensive and painful skin grafting of her groin and genital area with exorbitant medical bills, the 79 year old Grandmother sought to settle her claim for only \$20,000. McDonalds outright refused, even when faced with more than 700 claims by people burned by its coffee before this particular incident.

Ms. Saladoff's poignant movie goes beyond the sound bite to discuss why this case continues to haunt popular culture and how it was marketed for propaganda purposes. Here is a blurb from the *Hot Coffee* website:

“Seinfeld mocked it. Letterman ranked it in his top ten list. And more than fifteen years later, its infamy continues. Everyone knows the McDonald's coffee case. It has been routinely cited as an example of how citizens have taken advantage of America's legal system, but is that a fair rendition of the facts? *Hot Coffee* reveals what really happened to Stella Liebeck, the Albuquerque woman who spilled coffee on herself and sued McDonald's, while exploring how

and why the case garnered so much media attention, who funded the effort and to what end. After seeing this documentary film, you will decide who really profited from spilling hot coffee.”

It was well received at Sundance, and I can't wait to sit down with a *not scalding cup* of coffee and watch the flick in its entirety.