

Crook County: Racism and Injustice in America's Largest Criminal Court. By Nicole Gonzalez Van Cleve. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016. 272 pp. \$24.00 hardcover.

Reviewed by Thomas E. Reifer, University of San Diego

Crook County is a powerful sociological exploration of the largest unified criminal courthouse in the United States—Cook County, Chicago—a telling excavation of America's separate and unequal system of racialized criminal (in)justice. Based on 10 years of ethnographic fieldwork, Van Cleve dramatically reveals the role of the courts, and what she calls their “working groups,” judges, sheriffs, prosecutors, police, public defenders and private attorneys, in reproducing racial inequalities, in ways that remind one of Diane Vaughan's powerful thoughts on bureaucratic-organizational cultures. Portrayed here is a Goffmanesque world in which justice is absent, racial animus ever present, and bureaucratic rules of efficiency prioritize quantity over quality, all at the expense of defendants, their families and victims, mostly of color.

Van Cleve opens the courthouses' doors to show the legal habitus behind Durkheimian rituals of ceremonial racialized degradation that separate the criminalized poor from the sacred supposedly law-abiding White citizenry and concomitant White suburban legal establishment processing them through the system. Most defendants are charged with lower-level nonviolent offenses, too poor to obtain adequate legal representation or make bail. Hence, as in the film, the *Lincoln Lawyer*, they are guilty until proven innocent. Van Cleve uses her ethnographic gifts to underscore the culture and code of the courts, where a largely White professional class, including the substantial majority of Cook County's state's attorneys and judges, process defendants, overwhelmingly of color, with pictures of successful court cases won put up like prize fights. The title of the book comes from the nickname given to the court by persons of color who are the primary persons going through its halls in the segregated ghetto of Chicago where it resides, alongside the massive jail complex, dubbed the Hotel California by residents—“you can check in anytime you like, but you can never leave”—of which it forms the larger part.

The spatially and racially segregated nature of Chicago is mirrored in the complex, with front-stage and backstage performances of those at the bottom of the legal bar expertly and richly described, most especially for the persons of color that are the majority entrants to its hallowed halls of “justice.” In her ethnographic exploration, Van Cleve illustrates the central role of the White

courtroom as a gateway for the much higher rates of incarceration among disadvantaged communities of color that Robert Sampson has dubbed “punishment’s place.” In a justice system dominated by plea bargains—some 95% of all cases—Van Cleve shows how procedural justice becomes a charade. Particularly telling are the racial and moral codes that reinforce the distance between the largely White suburban professionals who staff the courtroom and the racialized, criminalized other, adding nuanced ethnographic detail to the changing racial demography and political geography of the criminal justice system outlined so powerfully in the scholarship of William Stuntz and the music of hip-hop artist extraordinaire, Tupac Shakur.

The description of the racialized tropes that sustain these courtroom performances, and the absence of justice and humanity, assaults the senses. And yet, while the criminalized and racialized others are sent off to jail, a quasi-separate privileged pipeline exists for White suburban defendants of middle-income origins, who are able to shore up their entitlement through proper middle class performances. Ordinary low-level poor offenders, in contrast, are processed assembly line style, so as to get to the “serious” violent cases, which sustains the sense of moral purpose for the courtroom working groups. Routine violations of due process and procedural fairness overwhelm the reader, as do the innumerable examples of how sheriffs, judges, prosecutors and lawyers all conspire to strip elementary human dignity from the masses of persons being processed, through ongoing performances by the court’s working groups. Though rights are ostensibly “guaranteed” what with the due process revolution in criminal procedure, those defendants attempting to exercise their rights to speak, or to a trial rather than a plea bargain, are shunned and punished, with racialized bias hidden via an ideology of procedural fairness concomitant with near-universal unfairness and racial bias, constructed through the moralizing lens of the undeserving, lazy, criminalized poor. Criminal defense attorneys meanwhile, are co-opted as part of the courtroom working groups, made to play by the rules of the high-quantity, low-quality justice game, lest they and their clients be punished. While each side of these working groups—the prosecutors, judges, and defendants—maintains their view of themselves as upholding the sacred versus the profane, the system works to keep conscience at a minimum, and bureaucratic efficiency at a maximum. Van Cleve tells this tale of suffering and bureaucratic efficiency and cruelty with considerable attention to nuance, including the narratives that the largely White professional establishment of the court tells itself to sustain its moral ethos and performances, even as some of them recognize the systemic nature of proceduralized (in)justice. We also see too how the persons going through the

system—the majority of them Black and Brown—desperately seek, and yet rarely find, a measure of justice and recognition of their common humanity.

Van Cleve's book is nothing less than a *tour de force*, and a clarion call for bringing egalitarian principles of racial and social justice to our most overlooked of criminal justice institutions, the courts. It forces us to confront “the everyday miscarriages of justice” that pervade today's courts, asking us what has become of Gideon's trumpet in the age of spatially and racially concentrated “mass incarceration.” The book is destined to become a classic, and ought to be on the mandatory reading list for citizens, law and society scholars and all sentient social scientists.

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Punishment in Popular Culture. Eds. Charles J. Ogletree, Jr. and Austin Sarat. New York: New York University Press, 2015. 320 pp. \$27 paperback.

Reviewed by Jessica Silbey, Northeastern University

The editors of *Punishment in Popular Culture* remind us that “through practices of punishment ... cultural boundaries are drawn, that solidarity is created through acts of marking difference between self and other, that these processes proceed through dis-identification as much as imagined connection.” (p. 2) This is no doubt true about the organization, justification and reception of various forms of punishment in society. It is no less true about the creation and cultivation of popular cultural forms of entertainment such as television and film. To be sure, punishment acts directly on bodies. And cultural forms—visual or textual stories about punishment or justice—act on bodies less directly. But both act on us, constituting individuals and communities as subjects, shaping our expectations and desires, implicating us in the moral points made. “Narratives do not stand outside social authority – they are part of it.” (Binder and Weisberg 2000: 23)

Punishment in Popular Culture is a collection of essays about the representation and circulation of stories about punishment and justice. The essays take as given the constitutive force of popular culture and combine it with the deeply rooted discourses about punishment to demonstrate their interdependence. Contributors to the volume are legal scholars, cultural critics, and social justice