

A day in court



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Professor Brian D. Heffner 7 December 2012 A Day In Criminal Court This week I had the opportunity to sit in on criminal court proceedings. I chose to visit the Oakland County Court House for the day and noticed quite a few things through out the whole experience. I have been to a few courts in the past, criminal, traffic, and family, but never in the Oakland County building. There were many details of the proceedings, the image, and even the conditions of everything from the building itself to the people involved that I found particularly interesting.

The first thing I thought when I entered the building was that it was not crowded. In previous visits to other courts the place was packed, let alone confusing. This courthouse was different. The hallways were very modern and clean and it felt fresh to me, not dark and dismal like it could have been. (I guess I have to also consider that I didn't have any charges against me so I wasn't entering the building expecting to hate being there) I was surprised by the security measures. It seemed as if it was too easy to get through. I expected to have three or four metal detectors lined up for a big crowd, but there was only one.

Right away I got the sense that the size of the building was not reflective of the amount of cases per day it accommodates. After speaking with one of the guards I was referred to the criminal court room rather than the family court, due to what he called a more interesting day. The courtroom itself I thought was way too small. There were only two and a half rows for people to sit and watch, forcing many people to have to wait outside. That I thought was not a well thought out design. There is tons of extra hallway space that

they could have stretched the room out to make it bigger so you wouldn't run into those kinds of problems.

The room also had extravagant fixtures hanging from the ceiling. I don't really understand the purpose of them, they may even have been lights, but they just looked like a waste of money. I don't think they serve any other reason than to look pretty, and if that's the case, they could have spent the money on the room extension. That's just my opinion of the building; another thing that struck me was the people involved. As I looked around the courtroom, I saw lawyers, citizens, guards, and of course the Judge. The Judge, I was informed, was the night Judge filling in for someone.

I was warned by my buddy, the guard, that he would be sluggish, but I thought it flowed nicely. I must first speak of the lawyers because they bothered me the most. These lawyers were slob! I realize that you may not make a whole lot of money being a public defender, but you could at least dress appropriately. One of these lawyers had his whole hem hanging out with string following him everywhere. This guy's pants were wrinkled and his hair completely void of any type of brushing. I would never hire any one that looked like that. and I would be scared if I had him assigned to me.

Another lawyer, a woman this time, was the most horrifying thing I have ever seen. Before she even came in she wanted a new lawyer because she was as dizzy. When she walked in I realized they had made a huge understatement. This woman had the most disgusting mess of hair on top of her head and she kept scratching it. It was like a huge crimped, teased, knotty mess. I couldn't believe that she would walk into a courtroom like that. Oh my God she was a

mess! I don't understand how she could represent anyone looking like that. There was only one professional looking lawyer and he was the prosecutor.

Everyone else looked third rate compared to him. The other group of people I looked at was the criminals. There was definitely a mixed group of people there. There was one lady in her 40's that was wearing a long fur coat and all the Jewelry in the world, and you could just tell she was ashamed to be there. Her husband wouldn't even sit in the courtroom with her. I really would have loved to know what she did wrong, but with all the bench conversation you never got to hear her crime, just her dismissal. Another guy that had charges against him wasn't even allowed in the courtroom because he didn't have the right shoes.

I thought that was completely unfair. He was outside the courtroom explaining that he didn't have any money to buy good shoes for the day, but they still wouldn't let him in. I guess all this stuff has been pretty superficial, but what really bothered me was how each of the cases was handled. I always thought that the public could view any courtroom proceeding, but I felt extremely short changed. In fact I think it was unfair to the criminals as well. It seemed like every case was decided at the bench before even saying what the charges were.

I know I sat through three hours of court and left only knowing what two of the cases was really about. When the incarcerated people were brought out it looked like they were clueless as to what was going on, because they couldn't hear any of it. They looked shocked sometimes when hearing the decisions as if they didn't know what was happening to them. I know that I

was shocked when I heard some of the verdicts because I had no idea what the crime was. For the most part they just announced codes not allowing the common person to understand a thing they're talking about.

After every decision the lawyer had to break it down to their own words to the clients. That annoyed me so much. I was also disgusted with one case in particular where they actually did describe the crime. A man and a woman had both committed armed robbery and in the process hospitalized two victims. Their lawyer had the nerve to ask for \$1000 bail for the two of them, pointing out the families of each of the criminals in the courtroom, explaining that they both had newborns to take care of. This lawyer had a 6 year old child in the courtroom to hear his father receive a \$50,000 bail. I just think that was wrong.

The lawyer knew there was no way in the world he was getting his client off, the guy had a rap sheet longer than the Bible from 4 different states, but he chose to put that kid through that. I don't get that. I guess overall my court experience was a pretty good learning experience. I learned to appreciate my lawyer a 100 times more just for his wardrobe alone. I learned that you always need appropriate shoes even if your clothes are as crappy as ever. I learned that the city of Oakland County prefers style to space accommodations, and most importantly I learned that it is cheaper to obey the law than to break it.