

Research paper on crook county

[Science](#), [Biology](#)



“ Crook County” is a body of work that focuses on the rampant racism and injustice being served to the people of Cook County, Chicago, Illinois by way of America’s largest criminal court. The author, Nicole Gonzalez Van Cleve, spent many years examining the culture of the court system that began with an ethnographic study when she was 19. The so-called colorblind system of what should be justice is thoroughly dismantled and the prejudice that exists in this small corner of America is, not so proudly, put on display. The author’s purpose for this published work is to inspire everyone to be involved and active with the courts and examine how the legal system should serve members of today’s society irrespective of race, creed or socioeconomic status. Her evidence is a solemn reminder that the courts belong to us, not the attorneys and judges that inhabit them.

The authors main research findings in “ Crook County” are rife with color-blind racism, a good ol’ boy network that perpetuates the stereotype, white privilege and racialized justice. Most of the public defenders (69%), trial court judges (74%) and attorneys (84%) are white, an incongruity to the defendants that were mostly African-American and Latino (69% and 11. 2% respectively). (Gonzalez Van Cleve, pg. 17)The vast disparity between the treatment of the white and black litigants, the racism that the white court watchers sitting in the gallery encountered and the disturbance they caused taking notes demonstrates a system rife with protectionism and discrimination. It amplifies how we are “ doing justice” in America. The book also sheds light on the criminality of the “ good guys”; police officers, prosecutors and judges that commit perjury to get the “ bad guys”. It is a system that has become corrupt and identifying the bias in the system will

get you labelled as a traitor and left on the outside of the in-group. Lawyers are often forced into a belief system that goes against their own morality and often is contrary to why they began practicing law originally. This is a clear demonstration of conformity and the idea of in and out groups.

(Giddens et al., pg. 143, 145)

Ms. Van Cleve is a witness and gives her testimony after hours spent in observation herself, along with 1, 000+ hours of other court watchers that observe the same corrupt and racially abusive circumstances that she reveals to us. The main implications of these research findings indicate that while we expect our criminal justice system to be the ideal, it appears to fall far short of that, given the research and findings of the author.

Unfortunately, policy reform in the justice system would be insurmountable. You cannot write reform against racism, it exists and continues to infiltrate the system, despite education and doctrines against it. An interview with an attorney, who was asked to contemplate the possibility of improvement in the failing justice system, when questioned how this improvement could be instituted, an acknowledgement of lower-income and poor education being likely culprits to the position the accused found themselves entrenched in. The need for rehabilitation, continued education and job training was due to a lack of resources, money being the most predominant. (Gonzalez Van Cleve, pg. 138)

It has been found that people do not act naturally when being observed, they may deliberately represent themselves contrarily to their customary behavior, even going so far as giving answers they think the researcher may

desire. (Giddens et al., pg. 47) In the chapter Separate and Unequal Justice, such an account takes place when an elderly white woman attends a court session and all the court staff “perform”, putting on an air of professionalism that endures only as long as the watcher is present. Upon leaving they all “burst into laughter” and returned to the normal behavior and informality they were accustomed to. (Gonzalez Van Cleve, pg. 44)

Interactionist Theories; among them the Labeling Theory of primary and secondary deviance. Closely followed by learned deviance with differential association. The simple fact that these people are in court, the judges and attorneys that serve them initiate the primary deviance level, the attorneys underscore this by entreating them to accept a plea deal, regardless of guilt or innocence, which furthers the secondary deviance, “the individual accepts the label of deviant and begins to act accordingly.” (Giddens et al., pg. 175) The author approached her research and analysis beginning with an ethnographic study, performed over years of being in the court system as a law clerk, and supplemented the research with interviews of judges, prosecutors and public defenders and an additional 130 other court watchers with over a thousand hours of observation. The court watchers were volunteers and recruited from local law schools, schools of social work and criminal justice, and undergraduate institutions. They were vetted with reviews of professional resumes, applications to ensure that they would be non-biased observers. Six universities were represented and the Chicago Appleseed, which according to their website, “is a nonpartisan, independent research and advocacy organization with connections to the justice system and a network of social justice organizations” and received pro bono support

from two local law firms. (Gonzalez Van Cleve, pg. 205)The dangers of being personally involved in an ethnographic examination and the possibility of not documenting incidents that go against the thrust of the prejudices, pre-conceived or not, that go into the work. The human condition does not allow for most people to immerse themselves in a culture, be among its people and not have a bias. I believe this is the main hazard of using the ethnographic form of research. It also follows that the findings might only apply to the group being studied, and it is not easy to generalize based on a single fieldwork study.

Furthermore, it is heavily reliant on the truthfulness and objectiveness of those participating in the court watching and interviews. There was anonymity to the reviews, but sometimes that can work against the research. As anyone that has been on the internet knows, anonymity can give people a protective guard that leads to a capacity to reach the wrong conclusions, and depending on what they know of the research, involuntarily and inadvertently bend the results to reflect what the ethnographer is trying to study. While it may appear to Ms. Van Cleve that these circumstances are overwhelmingly present in today's justice system, the limitation of fieldwork is that while it may appear rampant, Cook County is only a small microcosm of our justice system. She has devoted years and this is a product of her life's work and sometimes being too close or too involved with the study lends itself to the inability to have a non-biased or unprejudiced opinion. Perspective is everything.

In conclusion, recent research and news headlines have awakened many of us to the existence of police brutality, mass incarceration and the injustice of our democracy. Spotlights on underprivileged communities where poor and predominately black people live lives that we cannot imagine, let alone fathom, exist in a country that is staunchly heralded as a fair, impartial and colorblind nation. It is not only our job as citizens of this nation, but our duty to root out injustice where it lives and not stay silent in the face of racism and inequality. What is it about our society that allows these injustices to continue even with all the knowledge we are given? Further sociological study on the tendencies of acceptance of the social rules, roles and norms even in obvious evidence to the unfairness of it. The bystander effect, a term coined by social psychologists may explain some of this along with the fact that we suffer as a society from pluralistic ignorance we often look to others to determine how we should act, and we fail to inquire if no one else is questioning the status quo.