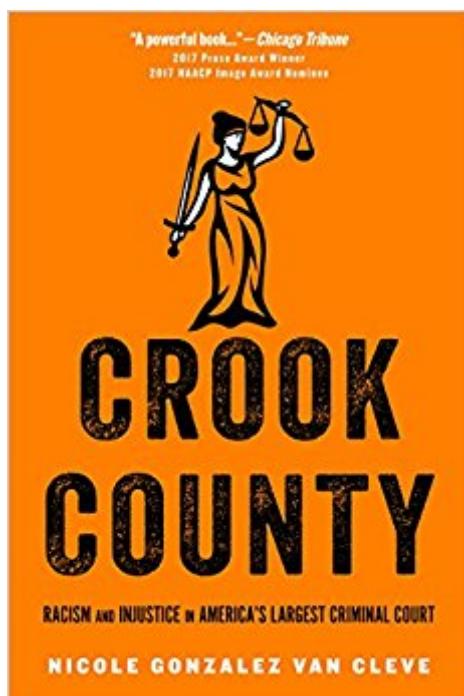


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# Crook County: Racism And Injustice In America's Largest Criminal Court



## Synopsis

Winner of the 2017 Eduardo Bonilla-Silva Outstanding Book Award, sponsored by the Society for the Study of Social Problems. Finalist for the C. Wright Mills Book Award, sponsored by the Society for the Study of Social Problems. Winner of the 2017 Oliver Cromwell Cox Book Award, sponsored by the American Sociological Association's Section on Racial and Ethnic Minorities. Winnier of the 2017 Mary Douglas Prize for Best Book, sponsored by the American Sociological Association's Sociology of Culture Section. Honorable Mention in the 2017 Book Award from the American Sociological Association's Section on Race, Class, and Gender. NAACP Image Award Nominee for an Outstanding Literary Work from a debut author. Winner of the 2017 Prose Award for Excellence in Social Sciences and the 2017 Prose Category Award for Law and Legal Studies, sponsored by the Professional and Scholarly Publishing Division, Association of American Publishers. Silver Medal from the Independent Publisher Book Awards (Current Events/Social Issues category).

Americans are slowly waking up to the dire effects of racial profiling, police brutality, and mass incarceration, especially in disadvantaged neighborhoods and communities of color. The criminal courts are the crucial gateway between police action on the street and the processing of primarily black and Latino defendants into jails and prisons. And yet the courts, often portrayed as sacred, impartial institutions, have remained shrouded in secrecy, with the majority of Americans kept in the dark about how they function internally. Crook County bursts open the courthouse doors and enters the hallways, courtrooms, judges' chambers, and attorneys' offices to reveal a world of punishment determined by race, not offense. Nicole Gonzalez Van Cleve spent ten years working in and investigating the largest criminal courthouse in the country, Chicagoâ "Cook County, and based on over 1,000 hours of observation, she takes readers inside our so-called halls of justice to witness the types of everyday racial abuses that fester within the courts, often in plain sight. We watch white courtroom professionals classify and deliberate on the fates of mostly black and Latino defendants while racial abuse and due process violations are encouraged and even seen as justified. Judges fall asleep on the bench. Prosecutors hang out like frat boys in the judges' chambers while the fates of defendants hang in the balance. Public defenders make choices about which defendants they will try to "save" and which they will sacrifice. Sheriff's officers cruelly mock and abuse defendants' family members. Crook County's powerful and at times devastating narratives reveal startling truths about a legal culture steeped in racial abuse. Defendants find themselves thrust into a pernicious legal world where courtroom actors live and breathe racism while simultaneously committing themselves to a colorblind ideal. Gonzalez Van Cleve urges all citizens to take a closer look at the way we do justice in America and to hold our arbiters of justice accountable to the highest standards

of equality.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Urgent and important, *Crook County* is a powerful, eye-opening account of the code of the big-city court system. Carefully dissecting this crucial step of the 'school to prison pipeline,' Nicole Gonzalez Van Cleve illustrates just how the scales of justice are cynically stacked against black and brown inner city young people, undermining their faith in our criminal justice system. *Crook County* is a must-read." (Elijah Anderson Yale University, author of *Code of the Street* and *The Cosmopolitan Canopy*)"In a groundbreaking new book, *Crook County: Racism and Injustice in America's Largest Criminal Court*, Professor Nicole Gonzalez Van Cleve adds an important, novel dimension to this problem. She exposes the deeply flawed operation of the criminal justice system by focusing on how felonies are processed in Cook County, Illinois...Van Cleve's important ethnography brings to light the hidden and pernicious workings of the criminal justice system that often operates in the shadows." (L. Song Richardson *Yale Law Journal*)"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." (Thomas E. Reifer *Law and Society Review*)"*Crook County* is a searing account of how criminal courts serve as the gateway to racialized punishment.

Turning a spotlight on the everyday actions of prosecutors, judges, and defense attorneys, Gonzalez Van Cleve reveals a court culture that dehumanizes and discriminates against defendants, victims, and family members. Her eye-opening analysis forces us to confront the possibility [or reality] that mass incarceration results from mass wrongful convictions of black and brown people forced into a devastating charade." (Dorothy Roberts University of Pennsylvania, author of *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*) "This book is public sociology at its best. It is theoretically grounded, methodologically rigorous and innovativeIn sharp detail, the book shows how the crisis of racism is routinized in the daily functions of formal institutions of justice. There are lessons in this book, then, for any criminologist or sociologist of crime, law or deviance. It transcends geographic boundaries and at once provides seminal insights into future ethnographic research Gonzalez Van Cleve demonstrates the power of ethnography in the best possible sense." (Benjamin Fleury-Steiner British Journal of Criminology) "Beautifully written and keenly insightful, *Crook County* is a horror story I couldn't put down. May Nicole Gonzalez Van Cleve's masterful book do for the Chicago criminal court what Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* did to the meat packing industry: clean it up. Powerful, disturbing and paradigm shifting, *Crook County* is ethnography at its best." (Paul Butler Georgetown Law, author of *The Chokehold: Policing Black Men*) "Gonzalez Van Cleve's account of the American criminal justice system, based on thousands of hours of careful observation behind the doors of the Chicagoâ "Cook County courthouse, reveals the paradoxes and pain of our modern legal culture, including the effects on the punished and punishers alike. As Van Cleve's investigation so startlingly lays bare, just because legal institutions profess to be colorblind does not make it so. Reading *Crook County* helps us see the difference." (Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Alphonse Fletcher University Professor Harvard University)

Nicole Gonzalez Van Cleve is an Assistant Professor at Temple University in the Department of Criminal Justice, with courtesy appointments in the Department of Sociology and the Beasley School of Law. She is a recipient of the 2014-2015 Ford Foundation Fellowship, an affiliated scholar with the American Bar Foundation, and a former Research Director for Chicago Appleseed Fund for Justice. She has provided legal commentary on the criminal justice system for MSNBC's The Rachel Maddow Show, NBC News, CNN, and The New York Times.

I agree with the reviewer who suspects the author started the project with an agenda. When I picked up the book I wondered the same and I began reading with some skepticism. However, she makes a very strong case, leaving me to feel that if she undertook the study with an agenda it turned out to

have some basis in reality. This is one of those rare examples of an academic writing a book that is an interesting read. As it happened I was reading the book at the very time the Stanford University swimmer was getting a slap on the wrist for raping a coed - something the judge justified by suggesting that a harsh penalty would interfere with the man's future success. While the judge's ruling was in my view outrageous, it was precisely the kind of scenario the author describes in this book. The book is based on a decade of observation and interviews and focuses exclusively on Cook County, Illinois. The reader is left to wonder about how widely the situation provided here applies in other jurisdictions. I was particularly impressed with the author's description of the pressures placed on judges, prosecutors, and public defenders. While an individual defendant or an individual victim may see their case as unique, the book does an excellent job of showing the larger context in which individual cases are handled - such as a lenient treatment of one defendant might put pressure to be particularly tough on the next. Like any good book this one makes you think.

Anyone who has been around 26th and Cal knows that what Dr. Van Cleve says is true. They may have different takes on what it means or how to improve it (or whether anything needs to be done). But it is an honest and vivid account of what happens there. Personally, I think she raises superb questions about what we are really trying to accomplish and whether this is the best way. I am embarrassed by how clear it is that we do not meet our ideals here. If the book falls short it is in the inability to prescribe a fix for the state our justice system is in. I suggest we have far, far fewer crimes so we can focus on the truly dangerous.

The author wrote about a poor and uneducated population, but wrote to a highly educated and sophisticated audience. I found myself using the dictionary quite often. I was employed by the Cook County Juvenile Court for 23 years, and it was a precursor to the Cook County jail system. I was unconscious when I worked there, but now I am aware.

Very informative. Loved it. We need more books like this one exposing Chicago's corrupt system by the people who worked in it.

Great book. Horrifying, comprehensive, and annoying

Justice in America? What a disgusting way to treat our citizens. The Gulag is next. When will it be our turn?

An excellent combination of social science professionalism and frontline experience

Racism is alive and well and everywhere

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