THE GANG CRIMES UNIT of the State’s Attorney’s Office in Cook County–Chicago was where the most bullish state’s attorneys worked. Many were nicknamed for their ferocity, sounding like their own gang of sorts—“Dirty Dog” Richardson, “Beast-Man” Miller, William “Billy Club” McManus, to name a few. These were the types of men who comfortably put both feet up on their desk and welcomed you to their office with the soles of their shoes.

Nameless mug shots of a stream of black and Latino defendants acted as wallpaper for their office—a visual souvenir of convictions and conquests. This wallpaper provided a striking, racialized backdrop to the practice of criminal law and was my introduction to the criminal courts and criminal justice. Nearly all the prosecutors who built and exhibited this showpiece were white; in contrast, nearly every mug shot in the mural was a person of color. I moved backward several steps so that I could see the entire wall, and then I paced reverently along it, as though I were scanning a memorial of the dead.

I was the only person of color in the room; I was the prosecutor’s unlikely new law clerk—a person who looked more like someone from the mural than an aspiring attorney in the office. Truth be told, I felt like a little girl playing dress-up in a power suit. I tried to keep my head down and fit in, but I was visibly stunned at the scale of the mural and the undeniable color line of “color-blind” criminal justice. Sensing my awe, my supervising prosecutor narrated
the environment: “You see the scum we have to deal with?” The mural provided a vivid, symbolic picture of who the “other” was in this dynamic.

Court professionals—prosecutors, defense attorneys, and judges alike—often used the phrase “working in the trenches” to distinguish their work in the criminal justice system as separate and different from more cushy or elite aspects of the law. The “trenches” implies a warlike dynamic, a place to hide under hostile fire, and begs the question *Who is the enemy?* I scrawled this note, and many others, in a small corner of my legal pad that became my first ethnographic field observations at this site. Nameless mug shots of a stream of black and Latino defendants provided a collective racial caricature of the prosecutors’ central mission as courtroom professionals. In the words of this prosecutor, they were taking this kind of “scum” off the street.

This book exposes the myth of colorblind criminal courts and examines how racial meanings become ingrained within the administration of justice despite procedural protections. Incarceration in the United States has grown seven times over the past forty years.¹ This growth is concentrated among blacks and Latinos and has transformed our social and political landscape, including the racial composition of our courts and prisons. The black-white difference in incarceration rates is particularly astounding. By all other social indicators of inequality, incarceration is unmatched. “Racial disparities in unemployment (two to one), nonmarital childbearing (three to one), infant mortality (two to one), wealth (one to five) are all significantly lower than the eight to one black-white ratio in incarceration rates.”² Furthermore, racially disproportionate incarceration contributes to a cycle of poverty, growing structural inequality, and higher (rather than lower) crime rates.³

Numerous works examine the collateral consequences of mass incarceration on poverty, crime, and inequality within communities of color and even on daily life,⁴ yet few works discuss the impact of racial disparity on the criminal justice apparatuses themselves. In fact, had I not ventured into the courthouse as a budding ethnographer assuming the role of a law clerk, I would not have seen the striking parade of black and brown defendants through courts managed by mostly white attorneys and judges. This book represents my journey to understand how the racial and social divides that manifest in the era of mass imprisonment affect the experience of justice in our criminal courts and the due process procedures that appear to be race-blind.
Inheriting Racism

Criminal courts are transformed by the patterns of segregation created by mass imprisonment. As such, the lawyers processing defendants tend to be white, educated, and upper-middle class and those being processed tend to be minority, uneducated, and poor. In the supposedly “post-racial” era of Obama, America’s purportedly colorblind racial ideology and racism manifest in more-covert, institutional, and structural ways. For attorneys working in criminal courts defined by racial segregation between defendants and decision makers, such obvious racial inequality in spaces intended to be race-neutral creates a cultural dissonance among the professionals who inherit this heightened racialized social system.

This book shows how professionals reconcile the cultural dissonance of racial segregation with the moral and institutional imperative to process cases and people, en masse, in the criminal justice system. It is about how criminal justice professionals in a main gateway of mass incarceration participate in the incarceration “machine” despite obvious racial divides, uncertainty with the meaning and morality of what they do, and conflict about what real “justice” means in a punitive era of being “tough on crime.” I explore how attorneys cope within the courts and how the racial divides between defendants and decision makers transform our courts into central sites of punishment, the likes of which legal scholars and reformers have failed to anticipate and interrogate. This book raises questions about modern forms of colorblind racism and the claim that they are kinder, gentler, and different from the overt forms of the past. As I show, imbued with the institutional authority of the state, hidden in the organizational contours of due process procedures, and normalized into insular cultures, colorblind racism transforms into state-sanctioned racial violence.

It took years of revisits to this field site (by myself and with other researchers) to understand how the enigmatic features of colorblind racism were not only operative but central to the efficiency of the system. The segregated, structural divides created by mass incarceration inform a type of racialized, legal habitus of ideologies and practices internalized in the production ethic of court procedure—the cultural engine of an entire assembly line of criminal justice. This habitus is like a “feedback” loop created by the broader trends of mass incarceration, the punitive turn in penology and punishment, and the intensification of surveillance and policing that impacts the lives of the poor and people of color.
Consequently, these trends in mass incarceration and the lingering cultural and racial stigmas they reproduce become incorporated as “embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history.” It is as though attorneys inherit a culture of racism that has existed “a priori” (before) their participation. The *a priori racism* that defines the courthouse culture and the legal habitus existed long before they arrived at the courthouse, and it will sustain itself long after they retire.  

From an institutional standpoint, the cultural beliefs and practices of this habitus drive all the taken-for-granted assumptions that define discretion in the criminal courts. These discretionary actions are the gaps between the formal rule of law and how attorneys interpret these rules in practice. From how to comport oneself as a courtroom “insider” to the very norms of practice that define the legal community, this embodied history aids in the categorization of cases and people that professionals manage as case flow. This habitus shapes the sharp moral boundaries between the mostly white professionals who process cases and the minority offenders who are being processed.

Traditionally, one thinks of colorblind racism as an enigmatic type of racism that codes racial difference as moral difference, thereby obscuring racial divides and the social inequalities they produce. Coded racial language makes the expression of colorblind racism a “slippery, apparently contradictory,” “rhetorical maze” with whites concealing racial beliefs with rhetorical moves and verbal strategies. Haney-López extends this concept with the term “dog-whistle politics” or the political use of coded racial appeals that manipulate hostility toward nonwhites. As he argues, the resonance of these racialized appeals pushes the political tides toward policies that reproduce white, elite advantage and amplify social inequality among middle-class whites and nonwhites. Studying the criminal courts brings these theories into the realm of everyday practices where white advantage and racial violence are reproduced in our most sacrosanct legal institutions.

Scholars of race contend that racism is more than simply ideology, that it is part of an entire system of institutions and structures that organize society. However, in research, the “doing” of colorblind racism is observed as a linguistic sleight of hand—“seen” and heard only through its verbal expression and linguistic maneuvers or in the macro-level, political realm. As Eduardo Bonilla-Silva argues, these racial practices operate in a more subtle, “now you see it, now you don’t” manner, yet, as Ian Haney-López shows, the effects on inequality and politics are dire.
Accounts of structural racism acknowledge that racial inequality is rarely produced by acts of blatantly identifiable racism; it is systemic, institutionalized, and frequently functions without the active participation of any one bigoted decision maker. Yet, critical race scholars note, such theories depersonalize how racial prejudice, racial inequality, and racial power are experienced between people or within institutions.

Missing is an empirical account that advances colorblind racism as more than just a “doing” of rhetoric, but a type of complicated habitus that informs institutional exchanges. Racism is done not just “out there”—in traditional measures of inequality like education, income, job prospects, and the creation of racial stigma—but also in the everyday workings “in here”—in the interaction and social exchanges that define the experience of institutions. Examining the criminal courts and the procedural exchanges required to process what has become a racialized underclass of marginalized offenders reveals how colorblind racism is practiced within institutional boundaries—even aiding in the efficiency of the system itself.

**Criminal Courts and the “Doing” of Racism**

In criminal courts, lawyers, especially prosecutors and judges, are forced to deliberate on the morality and criminality of others (on behalf of the state). As such, morality is a central currency wielded by professionals. By the nature of being held accountable by the courts, the defendant is labeled as immoral to the point of criminal. The professionals who process defendants, especially prosecutors who are at the helm of these legal proceedings, draw sharp distinctions between themselves and the defendants they process. These labels are dichotomous and absolute, and they rigidly delineate the prosecutor from the prosecuted, the judge from the judged, the defender from the defended—all distinctions that sharply demarcate the moral from the immoral.

Similar to moral boundaries maintained in criminal courtrooms, morality is a currency wielded in the “doing” of modern racism and is instrumental in drawing boundaries between whites and blacks while feigning colorblind ideology. As the logic goes, disdain for people of color is based not upon racial difference or inferiority as sets of biological features, but upon the moral inferiority that minorities embody. Often these immoral labels reference the historical stigmas, stereotypes, and controlling images associated with blackness and brownness—the supposed tendency to be lazy, hypersexual, and undermotivated, for example.
These distinctions about morality and criminality, on the one hand, and morality and racism, on the other, meddle within the context of our criminal courts; there, one’s moral status is conferred by both legal categories and racial categories. As such, the “immorality” of defendants is both a criminal distinction and a racial one. In this logic, disdain for defendants is not based on the color of their skin but on the moral violations they embody. With the authority of the law, a host of racialized abuses are not only allowable in public spaces but are seen as deserved and justified. Because a moral rubric supersedes racial difference, professionals maintain that court processes are “race-neutral” or colorblind.

A constant threat of violence patrols these courthouse arrangements. Armed sheriff’s officers police boundaries in the courtroom—boundaries that separate minorities from the court proceedings and, periodically, inflict random and cruel abuses on courthouse visitors as examples of how to “stay in line.” There is little outside accountability from the public or from other areas of the legal profession. The professionals practicing in the criminal courts operate in an environment where abuse, threats to defendants and their families, and policing of racial arrangements is normalized as part of community culture that informally governs the courts and allows professionals to valorize the moral purpose of their work. Without accountability and oversight, the criminal courts are their own social system, governed violently, with race underscoring a “grotesque caricature of due process and the rule of law.”

A Journey Into the Trenches of Justice

When I began this research on the criminal courts in 1997, I never intended to write a study on punishment and race. I anticipated examining traditional concerns of jurisprudence; perhaps a revisiting of Malcolm Feeley’s classic work The Process Is the Punishment, in which he looked at the pretrial costs of punishment imposed upon offenders before they pled guilty. I suppose it is a sad irony that my hypothesis was partially correct. I found racial punishment before, during, and after conviction. This style of punishment was not inflicted just on defendants. It was inflicted on their families or anyone, even victims, with black or brown complexions who happened to walk into the courthouse.

When I began writing my first field notes in the courts, I was only a nineteen-year-old undergraduate student. I was granted leave from traditional classes, and my field site was a training ground for the ethnographic study of a culture. I chose the Cook County–Chicago courthouse as my field site because
I had ambitions of going to law school and eventually becoming a prosecutor. I assumed a participatory role at the site, working as the prosecutors’ law clerk. 

Like many Americans, I anticipated a “law and order” arrangement: “tough on crime” rhetoric dominated my perceptions of our court. Yet, in those first days on the job as both a clerk and a young ethnographer, I found my senses assaulted by the number of blacks and Latinos on the list of detainees in the lockup. One by one, they paraded in bright orange jumpsuits, numbers written on their arms, some in shackles, their hair unkempt and unclean from the Cook County Jail, many of them younger than I was. Most were too poor to retain counsel, and I watched as their families, longingly and tragically, watched their sons, daughters, husbands, and boyfriends being taken back into custody to await trial or being sentenced to five, ten, twenty-five years or more. Rather than being charged with violent offenses, most were charged with possession of drugs, theft, intent to sell drugs, or other nonviolent offenses. The majority were pretrial detainees—offenders too poor to pay their bond, so they languished in the overcrowded jail—unable to work, parent, pay rent, provide child support, or any number of other daily tasks that if not done could tear apart one’s family or livelihood. What I was witnessing was the demographics of mass incarceration in action—a central gateway for mostly poor people of color to enter or cycle through a system of punishment. 

Naively, on my first day, I began tallying the number of minority defendants on my legal pad. During one court call, all but four of the thirty defendants were black or Latino. Those defendants who were white were often immigrants who needed language translators to understand the proceedings. I asked my supervisor to help me make sense of the disparity, but I was too scared to overtly ask about race. Instead, I mustered the courage to ask her about her views on crime and poverty—a question that could proxy race. She snapped at me for asking such a question, responding with a paternalistic trope about welfare dependency. Like my introduction to the Gang Crimes Unit, I stood intimidated by the response and realized, especially as the sole person of color among the professionals in my courtroom, that it was better to stand quiet and try to fit in. 

No doubt my own racial identity allowed for this access. I am Chicana but not dark-skinned. I came from a blue-collar Chicago neighborhood. I pronounce “Chicago” like a Chicagoan (shi-KAW-go). Accordingly, I could talk the slang with the insiders and could code-switch with the rough-around-the-edges prosecutors, defense attorneys, and even the cops. When I needed to
interact with the judges, I wielded my affiliation with Northwestern University, which was perceived as “elite.” I hid the fact that I was actually too poor to pay for my tuition, room, or board (a wealthy alumnus did that for me).

I was a young woman, and I realized that my age and gender could work to my advantage. I could feign ignorance and ask experienced prosecutors to explain their practices and beliefs. I often started my toughest question with, “This is a really dumb question but . . .” and they were often eager to teach me the ropes.

Balancing these numerous identities was strategic and allowed for access to a court culture known for its insularity. Most importantly, the heart-wrenching experience of racially passing in the eyes of the white professionals gave me cultural access: a chance to hear and observe white professionals as they talked outside of the frameworks associated with the veiled niceties of colorblind racism. I had access to a place where whites were allowed to stop being nice and start acting racist. I often contemplated the privilege and research access that my lighter skin afforded me and made a commitment to turn the ethnographic lens upon the white professionals doling out racial abuse.25

My time in the field was an indoctrination: the prosecutors, judges, and defense attorneys took me under their wings. It was through this process that I learned the rules of the racialized court system—rules that included both how to process cases efficiently and the proper moral and professional justifications for such practices. Often I reflected on that role; averted my eyes from defendants and their families, and hoped that I did not see anyone from my neighborhood. I would speak Spanish to the abuelitas who came into court and tried to help in marginal ways that only made me feel worse about my role. But mostly I felt fear. Fear to talk about abuse, fear to stop it, and fear to ask questions about it. In one instance, a judge who knew that I could sing asked me to perform in open court for a wedding that he was officiating as a favor. I thought the judge was joking and viewed it as unprofessional and even disrespectful to the families, defendants, and possible victims who were having their day in court. I whispered to the prosecutor and asked her how to say no. She said, “If the judge asks you to sing, you ask, ‘What song?’” There I was, like the judges and prosecutor’s marionette, singing in open court, “Wind Beneath My Wings,” shortly after defendants were sentenced to prison time. What little decorum was left of open court was shattered in this circus-like charade. My field notes acted as the one expression—the one place—where I could bear witness to all that I saw.
It took periodic revisits to my field site and field notes to fully see how these patterns emerged in their persistent and pervasive forms. This is not surprising given the enigmatic and “slippery” features of today’s modern form of racism, which ignores or denies the existence of discrimination and often shifts its concerns to moral rather than biological inferiority. What was surprising was that racism, in the context of the courts, was pervasive, direct, and violent. Day after day, I noted grave abuse—on and off the record—in front and backstage environments. There were times, dark times, when the callousness with which prosecutors and defense attorneys talked about dead victims, babies, mothers, and violence against blacks and Latinos was too much. I would have nightmares; I would stop eating; I went for on-campus counseling to talk about what I had seen. At one point, I vowed never to come back to my study or my field site. But, over time, perhaps like the professionals themselves, I became numb to the abuse; I observed it but did not question it. I disapproved of it but was not shocked by it. Perhaps this numbness was not unlike how many of the attorneys in this study were co-opted into being complicit in the cultural code of the courts. Or, perhaps, my pursuit of objectivity scared me into avoiding words like “morality,” “humanity,” “justice,” “redemption,” and other human rights principles that extended beyond this location.

In graduate school, I returned to the same courthouse and clerked in the public defender’s office to get an alternative point of reference, and I observed defense attorneys “coping” with the culture that I had noted five years earlier. Defense attorneys whom I interviewed admitted to racialized courtroom work-group practices, acknowledged their disdain and complicity in this culture, but admitted that these practices were long-standing and persistent. Over time, this pervasive culture came to seem like “business as usual.” In fact, making a big deal about the treatment of defendants, their families, or any courtroom outsiders was a sign among courtroom insiders that you were a little “wet behind the ears.” Certainly, acknowledging racial divides was met with silence, confusion, and hostility—informal sanctions so harsh that you never made the same mistake twice.

Five years later while revisiting these observations in graduate school, I developed a partnership with the Chicago Appleseed Fund for Justice—a social advocacy nonprofit—to create a court-watching program to police the professional standard of courtroom behavior. As an experienced ethnographer, I was charged with designing this program, which included the training materials and rubric by which court watchers would evaluate professionals. Court watchers
were systematically trained and instructed to examine court procedures, professional norms, and the overall professional decorum of the court. In all, 130 court watchers observed all twenty-five felony courtrooms—both on- and off-the-record practices. Ultimately, it was through their eyes that I began to see race again.

I assumed that I would receive accounts of the courts’ effectiveness, accessibility, and administration. As the court watchers’ detailed forms and written narratives came back for review, their outsider accounts of racial disparity and their stories of abuse along racial lines matched my initial impression of the courts. When I debriefed these researchers, many of them were shocked by their experiences, feeling either abused because they themselves were people of color or unsettled because they felt privileged and protected for being white. These data, which amounted to 1,000 hours of observations by court watchers with “fresh eyes,” rejected the “business as usual” explanations of courthouse practices.

I began revisiting my field notes for similar patterns. I reread my notes from the first day I walked into the court, the first image of the gang unit and their mug-shot mural, and I began merging my impressions with the more than 1,000 hours of observations from court watchers. The result was not just a stream of interesting “stories,” but a sociological account of a criminal court system defined by racial divides and meanings.

Armed with these data, I examine some of the classic questions about how our criminal courts function culturally and organizationally by engaging race and racism as a central variable overlooked by seminal works on criminal courts published after the “Due Process Revolution.” Specifically, how are courtroom workgroups and local legal culture affected by the racial divides that separate white professionals from minority defendants? What role do racial categories play in streamlining processes and maintaining efficiency? How do criminal courts reproduce racial politics—a particular social order divided along racial lines? How does this arrangement reproduce itself through bureaucratic practices that are defended as “colorblind” to the mostly white professionals governing it?

Racialized Justice in an Era of Colorblindness

In addition to providing an improved understanding of the racialized nature of the criminal courts, this book makes three central contributions to the sociological conception of racism and the broader dialogue regarding modern forms of racism and punishment. First, it addresses how the larger trends in mass
incarceration—namely, the racially disproportionate effects of punitive policies and laws—affect the criminal justice institutions tasked with maintaining the system. Segregation and racial inequality ultimately shape and inform institutions despite myriad due process protections, purported colorblind ideology, and bureaucratic formality that appear to protect against racism and racial bias.

Second, this case contributes to an understanding of how modern forms of racism are practiced within institutions. While scholars of race generally agree that racism is more than just “ideology” or a product of a few “bad apples,” here I address how racism can be practiced within institutions. In fact, racism is even emboldened by institutional rules and laws. Rather than a kinder, gentler brand of racism that hides in enigmatic ways, “doing colorblind racism” within institutions sanctifies racial abuse, as the immorality of one’s racial category is confounded with one’s criminal category. This raises questions about whether colorblind racism is, in fact, kinder, gentler, and more enigmatic than the overt racism of the past.

Finally, these findings speak to an important shift in the scholarship on punishment and social control. In an era of mass incarceration, defined by intense segregation and racial inequality, our criminal courts are transformed from central sites of due process into central sites of racialized punishment. This development has far-reaching implications for how we understand procedural justice, rule of law, legal ethics, legal consciousness, and ultimately, policies targeted at reform.

While this book demonstrates how racial punishment is wielded in the context of the criminal justice system, these effects could be operative in other segregated systems that claim to be race neutral, like social welfare offices, schools, hospitals, and other systems managed by whites who are mobilizing narratives about morality and governing the outcomes and the well-being of poor people of color. This is not just a story about the criminal courts or the law; this is a story about racism in action, culture in isolation, and the effects that both can have on an institution. Alarmingly, I chose to study a criminal court—a social institution that is supposed to be the bedrock of justice, impartiality, and fairness. Consider this field site selection the ultimate litmus test of how racism can infiltrate seemingly race-neutral institutions protected by the most stringent due process procedures, a court transcript—and even the Constitution. What we will see is that these protections are often transformed into tools of punishment, giving new meaning to Malcolm Feeley’s classic work *The Process Is the Punishment.*
INTRODUCTION

To examine these themes, I will take you into the courthouse where segregation is endemic and divided along racial lines, where people of color are forced to sit behind bulletproof glass as they watch their cases managed by an all-white cast of attorneys and judges. Here, we will journey in the hallways, dirty corridors, and isolated culture of a large urban courthouse defined by racial divides and policed through violence and fear. These scenes will be animated by the insiders who taught me the cultural rules of the courts, my own indoctrination into this culture, as well as the observations of outsiders or court watchers as they react to and retell the experience of viewing a space that has the look and feel of the Jim Crow era.

Dismantling Court Culture

To understand how professionals make sense of such racial disparities and even defend them as colorblind, I will pull apart this court culture piece by piece, as the prosecutors and judges narrate and teach the moral rationales for racialized justice. This close study will address how racialized scripts become hidden in the contours of justice—living in the “off-the-record” strategies and the practices of plea bargaining. As we will see, this book does not unearth rogue attorneys or racists, but it reveals court culture that thrives on racism to function efficiently—a complex culture that exists as its own social ecosystem, far from the oversight and accountability of the legal bar and the city at large.

I also provide evidence of how criminal defense attorneys construct a defense within the boundaries of a racialized court culture, and I show how criminal defense is more about navigating the cultural laws that govern the courtroom workgroup than about a sophisticated management of legal evidence, trial work, or the pursuit of legal motions. As a result, defense attorneys admit to becoming complicit in a racialized system that they find reprehensible.

While this culture of racialized justice is pervasive, it is not one-dimensional. I will delve into the complex notions of justice and law as seen by the two central adversarial players that define our criminal courts: the prosecution and the criminal defense. Classic accounts of criminal courts portray prosecutors and defense attorneys as interdependent, co-opted players sharing the same beliefs and organizational imperatives. Instead, we see how both prosecutors and defense attorneys can possess both normative notions of justice and racialized notions of justice. I argue that while racialized cultural logics govern and legitimize
how attorneys sort and dispose of cases, they retain thoughtful critiques and frameworks of fairness, justice, and reform.

Many prosecutors express a desire (and capacity) for race-neutral justice—even creating boundaries between themselves and police officers when overt bigotry becomes apparent in the system. Prosecutors identify what I describe as a “thin blue line of bigotry,” and locate racial bias as adjacent to (rather than within) their professional culture. And the defense attorneys, despite their expressed sympathies for defendants and their disdain for being complicit in a system that abuses their clients, often act as willing ambassadors of racialized justice. They use the rubrics and logics of racialized justice to determine which defendants are “worthy” of their time and resources while helping to translate the cultural laws of the workgroup to their clients.

Finally, I examine the implications of these arrangements on law, justice, and the consumer experience of our courts. I argue that coupled with institutional authority, the promise of procedural justice, and the guise of bureaucratic protocols, colorblind racism is anything but subtle or polite. I end with a call to action on holding our American criminal courts accountable.

**Crook County and the Code of the Courts**

Elijah Anderson’s book *Code of the Street* takes the reader on a journey to understand what, for some, is a foreign culture of morality and decency in the inner city. While writing this book, I decided to revisit Anderson’s text and was stunned by the parallels of our ethnographic accounts. For Anderson, inner-city life is governed by a moral code: a code of civility, on the one hand, and a code of conduct regulated by violence, on the other. I extend this construct to the criminal courts as an analytic tool to understand another inner-city community—a court community. Like the code of the streets, there is a notion of civility that is *written into formal law*. This stands in stark contrast to the “cultural code” that defines the *practice of criminal law*—one that more accurately doles out violent pretrial abuses the likes of which redefine the notion of pretrial punishment. The criminal courts have become a type of “street law” for “street people.” This statement speaks to how racialized justice bastardizes the practice of law, how well-intentioned practitioners become co-opted and often coerced into its culture, and how marginalized people become its primary consumers—whether as defendant, victim, witness, or family member lending support. This is ultimately an account of marginalized lawyers, practicing marginalized law for marginalized people. This book opens the courthouse doors
and reveals the indignities of justice as defined by the civility and violence of a culture. This is America’s brand of justice for the poor and people of color—a brand of justice that the local community calls “Crook County,” if only to mock the system’s legitimacy and redefine the attorneys as the true “crooks,” who dole out racialized justice like the pain of punishment.