

Essay Questions for Crook County:

1. *Crook County* begins with a quote from W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* which reads: “Thus grew up a double system of justice, which erred on the white side by undue leniency and the practical immunity of red-handed criminals, and erred on the black side by undue severity, injustice, and lack of discrimination . . . It was not then a question of crime, but rather one of color, that settled a man’s conviction on almost any charge. Thus Negroes came to look upon courts as instruments of injustice and oppression, and upon those convicted in them as martyrs and victims.” Describe how this double system of justice is maintained in an era of colorblind racism. What are the structural underpinning of this double system? What role does culture play in norms and practices? What role do legal apparatuses like the court record and due process procedures play in what Gonzalez Van Cleve calls “separate and unequal justice”?
2. Michelle Alexander’s book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, is one of the most recent works that has generated public and scholarly interest in mass incarceration and its dire effects on communities of color. Alexander’s admittedly paints with a “broad brush,” when exploring how race and racism explain mass incarceration. She asks the poignant question “How exactly does a formally colorblind criminal justice system achieve such racially discriminatory results?” Describe how Gonzalez Van Cleve answers this empirical question. Be sure to describe the multiple types of data and evidence that she uses to make her claims about racial disparity in the criminal courts.
3. One criticism of “Crook County” is that perhaps class-based stigma (rather than race-based stigma) is the explanation for why defendants and victims are mistreated by court personnel. Explain how the author addresses this criticism in her data collection methods and whether you find it a compelling answer to skeptics who believe that classism is now the new racism.
4. At one point in *Crook County*, Gonzalez Van Cleve intervenes in a court case to increase the defendant’s sentence length. For extra credit, please describe this case and explain why the author intervenes in that moment. Then reflect on what this example says about the criminal justice system (e.g. draw a link between the case and any other aspect of the course material).
5. How racially coded language and words like “mopes” operate in the court? Explain the how this language relates to certain types of cases or offenses on the court docket.
6. Gonzalez Van Cleve discusses the many costs and challenges of racially passing in a “racially demarcated” court system. Describe how the author engaged in “identity” management (gender, race, class, education, age and other status-markers) in different context within the court system. How did she used these identities to earn “street cred”?

© Copyright Nicole Gonzalez Van Cleve 2017
All Rights Reserved

“Crook County Learning Extras” are based on the book:
“Crook County: Racism and Injustice in America’s Largest Criminal Court”
Written By: Nicole Gonzalez Van Cleve
Published by Stanford University Press

7. Discuss the unique, interdependent relationship between prosecutors and police officers. How do prosecutors maintain distance from police?
8. In chapter 4, Gonzalez Van Cleve discusses how prosecutors create boundaries between themselves and police officers who are often their “star” witnesses. What is boundary work, how do prosecutors work to maintain boundaries, and how do these practices create racial harm within the court system?
9. In chapter 5, “Rethinking Gideon’s Army,” Gonzalez Van Cleve discusses zealous advocacy in Crook County and the types of compromises made by public defenders. Define zealous advocacy and discuss the ethical hurdles facing defense attorneys as they represent their clients. Include a discussion of how attorneys “triage” their clients like an emergency room.
10. The book cover art of *Crook County* shows lady justice altered in particular ways that make her “untraditional.” Reflect on the cover image of the book and examine how this image illustrates themes or concepts from the book related to: punishment, justice, due process, fairness, or equality.
11. One common policy solution to “fixing” racism in the criminal justice system is to increase diversity of prosecutors and judges. Discuss whether you believe this is a viable solution to improving justice in Crook County. Why or why not? Use concepts from the book to illustrate your point of view.
12. Sociologists often talk about front-stage and backstage behavior and use the metaphor of social interaction as a type of drama or performance for other actors or people in a social setting (see page 39). Discuss how racism altered the traditional notion of front and backstage behavior and provide clear empirical examples to illustrate your answer.
13. How has mass incarceration and its racially disparate features influenced how justice is experienced in the criminal courts? Discuss how mass incarceration influences segregation, culture and practices and include empirical examples from the text.

© Copyright Nicole Gonzalez Van Cleve 2017
All Rights Reserved

“Crook County Learning Extras” are based on the book:
“Crook County: Racism and Injustice in America’s Largest Criminal Court”
Written By: Nicole Gonzalez Van Cleve
Published by Stanford University Press