

“BOOK REVIEW”
**“NO MATTER HOW LOUD I SHOUT:
A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF JUVENILE COURT”**

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INTRODUCTION

The book *No Matter How Loud I Shout: A Year in the Life of Juvenile Court* is written by Edward Humes.¹ The book is divided into four parts. Per Humes, so little has changed in reference to juvenile justice system and he believes that juvenile court is the unwanted step child of our system still facing lack of staff and funding issues. Per Humes, only faces of boys and girls change, rest everything remains the same. The author has shown his concern for young juveniles who haven't even reached the age of shaving but are being tried in adult courts. Early and correct intervention in the lives of these young children on part of the parents, juvenile justice system, and society can help them not to go astray and can help in stopping them from becoming worst members of the society. Even if children commit any offence, the society should be sensitive enough not to reprimand them, but to make them understand the difference between right and wrong, however, the weaknesses and loopholes of the present juvenile justice system act as hindrances in according punishment in proportion to the offence committed by them. The book portrays the stories of Elias, George, Carla, Andre, Ronald and many more. The story of the book revolves around the juveniles, their families and their encounters in juvenile courts of Los Angeles. Most of the juveniles' names and their families' names are changed in this book except for a few ones who are older juveniles and are being treated as adults for some serious crimes such as murders. These juvenile courts are the places where their lives take such dangerous turns that it seems like there is no turning back. Their lives get changed as per the law demands. Part one of the book *We're Drowning* covers some heartbroken stories of these young children as the name itself suggests that the juveniles are “drowning” and that they need help. The author draws our attention to the stories of carelessness issues of sheriffs and justice system which are horrific. The case of Gerald Francis Gault is one of them. The fault of Gerry was that one afternoon in 1964; he telephoned Mrs. Cook and admired her physical beauty in an obscene way. At that time, he was just a fifteen-year old boy. At such a tender age, children are not aware

¹Edward Humes, *No Matter How Loud I Shout: A Year in the Life of Juvenile Court*, Simon & Schuster, (1996)

of the mischiefs they are doing and how these mischiefs can land them in troubles. On the complaint of Mrs. Cook, the sheriff charged Gerry with juvenile delinquent act and put him in jail. Gerry was not even made aware of his constitution rights and neither his parents were informed of his arrest. The arresting officer didn't even try to inform his parents about this issue nor did he leave any note for them. When the parents came home in the evening from work, they found Gerry missing. After inquiring in the neighborhood, they came to know that he was arrested. When the parents visited probation officer, then he informed them that their son's fate was now in the hands of the judge and that the court hearing was in a week. Without any actual evidence and testimony of Mrs. Cook, the court delivered its verdict and pronounced him guilty of juvenile delinquency. Through this incident, the author is trying to draw our attention towards the fact that there is a thin line between mischief and crime. If Mrs. Cook had informed his mother before complaining about him to the police, it would have been better. It was not a crime of a level for which he should be labeled as "immoral." He could have been charged a fine of \$5-\$50 for making such a call but labeling him a delinquent was something shameful. He was not even allowed to have an attorney who could defend him. The principles of natural justice were not followed. Here comes the role of the society. Had Mrs. Cook acted wisely and had the sheriff done his duty seriously and honestly, nothing of this sort would have happened. The things wouldn't have taken an ugly turn. Being a juvenile, he had no right to appeal. Judge's decision was the final decision. Even Mrs. Cook was not present at the time of the hearing. Gerry was kept in juvenile detention for the next six years. Later, this case made the headlines and drew the attention of many. It became the landmark case in the history of America. After this case, in 1967, children were provided with legal rights. Before 1967, there were no legal rights and the fate of the kids was at the mercy of the judges. Another loose case described in the book is of Richard who was charged with car theft but since LA police department was busy handling other serious crimes, Richard was released the same day he got arrested. Three months later, he formed his gang named 'Young Crowd' and committed a riot at a hospital. He celebrated his crimes and loopholes of the justice system.

CHAPTER WISE ANALYSIS

Chapter One describes the experience of Deputy District Attorney Peggy Beckstrand's in her own words, "The first thing you learn about this place (Juvenile Court) is that nothing works" (Humes, 2015). These were her words when she conducted a small but brief tour of worn out juvenile court house. Here, she is not talking about the broken parts of the building but about the broken parts of the system's failures. After this case, Robert's case is discussed in the court of

Judge Dorn who is very strict with those children who miss their school classes and don't comply with his court orders. Judge Dorn is considered good by the parents as the advice he gives to these children is impeccable! Judge Dorn said to these children that he can send them to school for better learning, but he can't make them learn. So, he sent Robert to boot camp.

Chapter Two Home Girl discusses the story of Carla James who got an A in her English test and B in her Math the day she was charged of committing juvenile crime. Her father had died in a car accident. School counselor got worried when two sheriffs came looking for Carla in the school and told that she was a shooter. Counselor was shocked to know that Carla was not a victim but the offender. Carla seemed to be caring and loving but now she became a part of that group which was involved in violent crimes. After reading her story, what can be made out is that it was her father's death which made her aloof and antisocial. Her mother couldn't control her ways and the consequence of which was now before the society in the form of New Carla in a gangster suit. Carla's mother knew that something bad was going to happen, but she had no control over it.

Chapter Three Nine Days to Manhood describes the story of Ronald Duncan and how he was charged with murder which he repeatedly denied of having even committed and that too just by entering a van for a ride. It seemed like he became a victim of being present at the wrong place and at the wrong time. Although initially he pleaded innocence, later he changed his statement and confessed his crime. At the time of these murders, Ronald was just "nine days" short of his sixteenth birthday. So, he could not have been tried as an adult. He would be out and go free by the time he attains an age of 25. Per California law, if a person at the time of committing such a crime is sixteen years old or more, he has to serve life imprisonment without parole. The name of the chapter itself suggests it. But if the person is treated in a juvenile court then he is free to go after a few years. It seems illogical that a person who is exactly sixteen at the time of committing crime is to be tried as an adult and the person like Ronald who is fifteen years and 356 days old is tried in a juvenile court. Peggy couldn't understand what cognitive difference these "nine days" would have made. Per Peggy, "We have to live with this. It makes no sense." She believes spending millions of dollars of money on these trials is just wastage when we know that the kid actually did the crime but would be set free. This chapter also discusses the horrible story of Peter and his sexual assault at the hands of his father.

Chapter Four Judge Dorn discusses the story of Geri and his parents' insensitive approach to life. Both parents were busy with their illegal plantations of marijuana in their backyard and were busy with their sexual activities which were not a healthy sign for Geri's childhood. Later, his mother worked as a prostitute and they lived in motels for their survival until his mother was

sent to jail. Geri was in the system forever. This chapter also discusses about the Menendez brothers case where they killed their parents. Per Elias, a simple rule works in the court and that is you should be rich and white in color. Geri's attorney told him that he was a black kid with gun and charged with murder and judge of Pomona Branch of Juvenile Court (area dominated by white people) is just going to have a look at him once and he is gone. When Geri told him that he didn't kill anybody, the attorney replied, "I know but it doesn't matter." Geri narrated his story to his friends that if it had been a different judge in his case like Judge Dorn (Tough judge, but good), then the situation would have been different.

Chapter Five Punks discusses about how witnesses are treated in juvenile court rooms. A witness in armed robbery case said that he had come there for the fourth time as a witness in *People vs John Sloan* case, but he feels as if he himself is a victim. After hours of long waiting hours, he had to come again which wastes a lot of his time. Delay in court room cases wastes witnesses' time and money both as they have to take leave from their work. But no one knows who is to be blamed. This chapter portrays Judge Dorn's powerful way of communicating and his approach of making right decisions.

Chapter Six Raised by the State discusses about the plight of those children who were raised by state as there was no one from the family available to raise them. For example, George's mother spent most of her time in prison and his father died of drug overdose by the time he was 2 years old. He was not aware of where his older brother was. His little sister being good looking was adopted by some family. He met her only once and later he got news of her being killed by a drunken driver. The chapter discusses the psychological problems, traumas, and pains through which these children have to go through when they are sent from one foster home to another by the authorities and social workers. No one in the system tried to pay attention to his problems. His life was being consumed by anger and depression and sometimes it took the "hysterical" approach. Racial discrimination was also a strong factor which went against these kids in most of the trials.

Chapter Seven War discusses about the lateness and inefficiency of defense attorneys on the cases. It seemed like a war like situation between Judge Dorn and inefficiency of the system.

Chapter Eight Juggling Act discusses how much hard work and sleepless nights Peggy is putting in her trial but still she feels it will not be worth it. This chapter also discusses the issues of large number of trials being handled by a single judge and how the courts are understaffed. Part two: *Softening UP* covers the next four chapters in the book.

Chapter Nine The Big Fix discusses about the worry of policy makers on how to stop the accelerating crime rate of juveniles and what ways can be adopted to fix it. The rate of juvenile

crimes is alarming. It is three times the adult crime rate. Per Judge Dorn, "The Juvenile Court is the best engine of Social Change." He believes the juveniles need to be handled carefully. Daily in-chamber sessions held by judge Dorn are the proof that he believed in shifting the focus of the juvenile court to younger children for whom violence, arrest, addiction or death is still preventable (Humes, 1996).

Chapter Ten Sister Janet discusses about the warm relationship between Sister Janet and Elias. This chapter discusses about the juvenile solitary confinement in the form of "The Box". Story of Elias is discussed that how he couldn't accept the deal and how he was not able to confess that he was a murderer.

Chapter Eleven HOP discusses about the failures committed on part of the probation officers due to the excessive case load. Sometimes probation officers fail to conduct interviews of victims and their family members and fail to visit the homes of potential probationers (Humes, 2015)

Chapter Twelve Judge Dorn's Solution discusses about the ability of the judge in saving children through his mindful counselling. Once, in his chambers, he told a girl that if someone is guiding her not to follow her mother's advice then be assured that that person can never be her friend. Part three: *A Child's Disposition* further covers five chapters namely *Thirty-One Flavors*, *The Dorn Wars*, *Lost Causes*, *The Ins*, and *The Outs*. These chapters too highlight the large number of case files in court rooms, lot many people waiting outside, anxious parents, and worried children. Discussion is based on the length of sentences to be inflicted upon various children and on Inglewood's murder spree. Judge Dorn stresses on the timing and paper work of the cases. This part of the book discusses about Geri and his Pomona court trial along with sniper and illegal possession of concealed pistols. Last part of the book, *A Year Later, Another Day in Court* discusses about the content and thickness of a file. Judge Dorn's experience is so much that without reading the contents of file and by only looking at the thickness of the file, he can make out where the offender stands. If the file's thickness is over two inches then the child is probably a "Sixteen-Percenter." Issues like Budget-cuts are also discussed in this chapter.

CONCLUSION

Humes has made convincing arguments throughout the book with examples of different families, children, and their witnesses. Author has tried to provide an insightful perspective of the Los Angeles Juvenile Justice Court System, "the largest juvenile justice system in the world" while making observations about the system for one year (Phillips, 1999). Youth is the future of the nation. Children must be nurtured with utmost care. Rising costs, inefficient systems, and high recidivism rates have recently challenged the social and economic value of secure

confinement for juvenile offenders (Ryan, Abrams, & Huang, 2014). But it can be surely stated that the change cannot happen by a single person. As it has been stated that Judge Dorn had been working relentlessly to ensure that the juvenile offenders are accorded punishment in proportion to the offence which they have committed. Most of the times, he followed his belief, that they can be transformed if proper care and guidance is given. Although the book illustrates that juvenile delinquency occurs because of the familial problems like neglect faced from parents and divorce, but no matter what the reason maybe, judicial authorities all over the world must adopt the reformatory theory of jurisprudence as an eye for an eye will make the whole world blind.
