



# Courtroom 302: A Year Behind the Scenes in an American Criminal Courthouse

By Steve Bogira

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## Courtroom 302: A Year Behind the Scenes in an American Criminal Courthouse By Steve Bogira

Steve Bogira's riveting book takes us into the heart of America's criminal justice system. *Courtroom 302* is the story of one year in one courtroom in Chicago's Cook County Criminal Courthouse, the busiest felony courthouse in the country.

We see the system through the eyes of the men and women who experience it, not only in the courtroom but in the lockup, the jury room, the judge's chambers, the spectators' gallery. When the judge and his staff go to the scene of the crime during a burglary trial, we go with them on the sheriff's bus. We witness from behind the scenes the highest-profile case of the year: three young white men, one of them the son of a reputed mobster, charged with the racially motivated beating of a thirteen-year-old black boy. And we follow the cases that are the daily grind of the court, like that of the middle-aged man whose crack addiction brings him repeatedly back before the judge.

Bogira shows us how the war on drugs is choking the system, and how in most instances justice is dispensed—as, under the circumstances, it must be—rapidly and mindlessly. The stories that unfold in the courtroom are often tragic, but they no longer seem so to the people who work there. Says a deputy in 302: "You hear this stuff every day, and you're like, 'Let's go, let's go, let's get this over with and move on to the next thing.'"

Steve Bogira is, as Robert Caro says, "a masterful reporter." His special gift is his understanding of people—and his ability to make us see and understand them. Fast-paced, gripping, and bursting with character and incident, *Courtroom 302* is a unique illumination of our criminal court system that raises fundamental issues of race, civil rights, and justice.

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## Courtroom 302: A Year Behind the Scenes in an American Criminal Courthouse By Steve Bogira Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #623421 in Books
- Brand: Knopf
- Published on: 2005-03-22
- Released on: 2005-03-22
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.40" h x 1.40" w x 6.50" l,
- Binding: Hardcover
- 416 pages



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### Editorial Review

#### From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Chicago-based journalist Bogira's first book is an outstanding journey inside the American criminal justice system that nicely complements last year's *Blue Blood*, Edward Conlon's inside look at the life of a big-city cop. Like that instant classic, this book—centered on the Cook County Criminal Courthouse, "the biggest and busiest felony courthouse in the nation"—punctures the popular myths engendered by TV shows like *Law and Order* to provide a balanced view of the realities of the day-to-day, assembly-line grind that marks so much of the process from arrest to final disposition. The author's ability to gain the trust of so many different participants in the grim drama—judges, public defenders, prosecutors, court officers, prison guards and many defendants—is remarkable, and he often comes close to presenting a more complete picture of the truth of a particular crime than emerge in court in the or in the few cases that actually go to trial. Despite this access, Bogira does not gild the people he describes; even Judge Daniel Locallo, the book's central figure—whose courtroom witnesses racial violence, pathetic thievery, the abused and the mentally incompetent, and who, on balance emerges positively—is portrayed warts and all. The brilliance of Bogira's insights will lead many to hope that he will follow this debut with proposals to cure the many ills he has diagnosed.

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#### From School Library Journal

Adult/High School-The grim reality of the urban criminal justice process hits readers with a wallop as they are welcomed as prisoners to Chicago's Cook County Criminal Courthouse, the biggest and busiest felony courthouse in the U.S. From the harsh and dehumanizing treatment of prisoners, they move to Courtroom 302, presided over by Judge Dan Locallo. Through the perspectives of the defendants and their families, the prosecutor and the defense attorney, guards, deputies, juries, and court personnel, Bogira provides an engrossing look at the human drama of the cases, including the racially motivated beating of a 13-year-old black boy by the white teenage son of a family believed to be Mafia-connected. The horrific injustice of the flawed system cries out from almost every page, even as honorable and intelligent, yet all too human court officers work diligently within it. The author provides the historical background and rationale for the plea bargaining, the unintended consequences of "drug courts" resulting in more arrests for criminals holding small amounts of drugs, and the pressures, political and administrative, that judges standing for retention election face. He reveals how these factors actually impact the accused, the victims, and their families. This is a riveting wake-up call for students who mistake the slick justice of television courtroom dramas for reality.-Jane S. Drabkin, Chinn Park Regional Library, Woodbridge, VA

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#### From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

*Courtroom 302* earned high marks for the extensive reporting and detailed writing that let readers accompany the author behind the scenes of a big-city courthouse. Reviewers also praised Bogira's first book as accurate, precise, authoritative, and comprehensive. But several felt the book's straightforward journalistic approach lacked heart: *Courtroom 302*'s "removed, reportorial tone mirrors the pervasive aloofness of the system itself," public defender David Feige complained in *The Washington Post*. A few criticized the book's dense details. Ultimately, though, even Bogira's critics note that his book succeeds in its larger goal: depicting a legal system where, in the author's words, "justice miscarries every day by doing precisely what we ask it to."

## Users Review

### From reader reviews:

#### **Robert Carlson:**

Reading can called thoughts hangout, why? Because while you are reading a book especially book entitled Courtroom 302: A Year Behind the Scenes in an American Criminal Courthouse your head will drift away through every dimension, wandering in most aspect that maybe unidentified for but surely can be your mind friends. Imaging every word written in a book then become one contact form conclusion and explanation in which maybe you never get prior to. The Courtroom 302: A Year Behind the Scenes in an American Criminal Courthouse giving you another experience more than blown away your brain but also giving you useful data for your better life with this era. So now let us present to you the relaxing pattern the following is your body and mind will probably be pleased when you are finished reading through it, like winning a casino game. Do you want to try this extraordinary spending spare time activity?

#### **James Stumbaugh:**

You are able to spend your free time you just read this book this reserve. This Courtroom 302: A Year Behind the Scenes in an American Criminal Courthouse is simple to deliver you can read it in the area, in the beach, train in addition to soon. If you did not have got much space to bring the actual printed book, you can buy the particular e-book. It is make you much easier to read it. You can save the actual book in your smart phone. Therefore there are a lot of benefits that you will get when you buy this book.

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