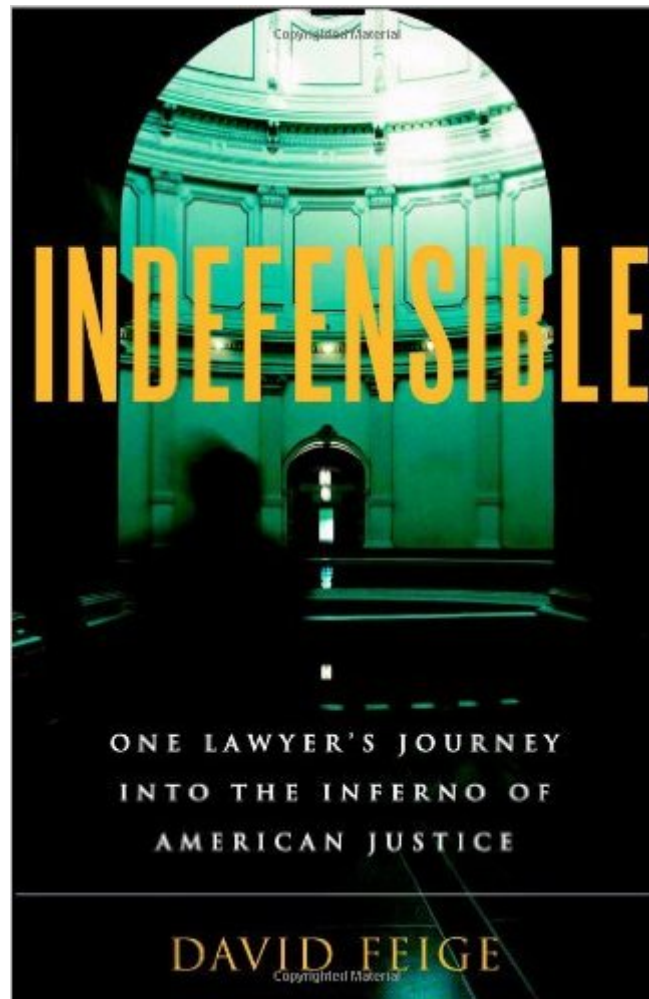


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Indefensible: One Lawyer's Journey Into The Inferno Of American Justice



Synopsis

With verve and insider know-how, a young lawyer reveals his outrageous and heartbreaking long day's journey into night court.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

'Indefensible' is brilliant. Feige is a very talented writer with gripping subject matter. I don't know how to describe the difference between great writing (which is rare) and writing that isn't good (which is everywhere). But I know it when I read it, and this is it. Feige completely transports the reader, you are there with him, and all the senses are engaged. You smell the urine, vomit, and the stench of homelessness. You taste the fried, fatty fast food that is the only eating option in the vicinity of the courthouse. You hear the yelling, the crying, the footsteps on the tile floors. You see the ill-fitting, second-hand suits, the inventive hairstyles of the projects. You feel the touch of the crowds, the cold air outside, the interminable wait for the elevator, the sexual tension with an ADA (in the elevator!). The book reads better than any legal fiction and obviously, because it is true, has much more emotional impact. I can't count the times (mostly in the first half) that I laughed out loud. Absurdities abound, and he front-loads the book with the funny stuff. It's a good strategy, because once you're lulled in, he really socks it to you. In one simple story of trying to get through the endless line for the metal detectors (just to enter the courthouse), he tells of the court officers confiscating a sandwich from a homeless woman - the only food she has to eat that day. After trashing her sandwich, she begs them to let her go through and not have to re-enter the line and wait another hour, they eject her anyway. She's lost her place in line, most likely lost her

all-important court appearance, and she's lost the only food she would eat that day.

I pre-ordered this book right before I took the bar exam, but didn't get around to reading it until I visited my parents' house almost a year later. In the meantime I'd passed the bar, been sworn in as a lawyer, and spent nine months as an ADA in the Big City (not the same Big City where Feige practiced, but not much changes in the grimy world of high-volume, high-stress courthouses). I found this book when I came back home for vacation, and just finished reading it last week. I'm glad I accidentally waited so long before reading it. I think a book like this looks different from the inside than the outside. It has different benefits: rather than giving you a glimpse inside a new world, it makes you look at familiar surroundings from a new perspective. In a career where every professional relationship is adversarial and the other side is often met with suspicion (and often with good reason), it's invaluable to get an honest view of what the other side is thinking. Feige's book is an excellent reminder of the fact that we're still all human in a sometimes inhumane system, and of how it is possible for good and worthy people to stand on both sides of the courtroom. I realize that sounds incredibly basic, but it's so easy to forget in the battlefield. The book provides some reassurance that I'm not failing in my job when I cut defendants breaks, or withdraw charges when justice doesn't line up with the letter of the law. And it reminds me to be decent to the defenders who are decent in turn, because the good ones are horribly overworked and underappreciated in what they do. I'm grateful to be reminded of those things. I needed it. Of course the book has its flaws; all books do.

I am not fond of criminals. Nor can my politics be considered left-wing. However, I do believe in the Constitutional right to due process and David Feige's "Indefensible" shows how Americans are routinely denied this right without a whimper from the elitist liberals and their mainstream press pals. Steve Bogira tried showing the nature of the criminal justice system in his "Courtroom 302" (Courtroom 302: A Year Behind the Scenes in an American Criminal Courthouse, but that came out sounding like a left-wing whine blaming everyone except the lawbreaker. Feige was a public defender in New York for more than 15 years. He tells the story of those years with a touch of humor, an understated admission of the psychic pain he suffered as the system ground down defendants, their families and their lawyers, while elevating and protecting incompetent (if not corrupt) judges, prosecutors and police. His story has the ring of truth. He talks about innocent people railroaded into pleading guilty just to escape the system. Of evil judges who gave no second thought to wrecking families and lives. (He names names.) He doesn't resort to the usual left-wing

nostrums of blaming society, demanding more money to perpetuate dependent welfare or any of that. By simply stating the facts from his perspective, Feige makes a strong argument for thorough reform of the criminal justice system. Right now the system isn't concerned with justice, but simply keeping itself going. As I said, I have no sympathy for actual criminals and it irritated me a bit to read of Feige negotiating down sentences of robbers and murderers.

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