



# Justice Performed: Courtroom TV Shows and the Theaters of Popular Law

*Sarah Kozinn*

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*Justice Performed: Courtroom TV Shows and the Theaters of Popular Law* is the first study of the reality TV genre to trace its theatrical legacy, connecting the phenomenon of the daytime TV shows to a long history of theatrical trials staged to educate audiences in pedagogies of citizenship. It examines how judge TV fulfills part of law's performative function: that of providing a participatory spectacle the public can recognize as justice. Since it debuted in 1981 with *The People's Court*, which made famous its star jurist, Judge Joseph A. Wapner, dozens of judges have made the move to television. Unlike the demographics in actual courts, most TV judges are non-white men and women hailing from diverse cultural and racial backgrounds. These judges charge their decisions with personal preferences and cultural innuendos, painting a very different picture of what justice looks like.

Drawing on interviews with TV judges, producers and production staff, as well as the author's experience as a studio audience member, the book scrutinizes the performativity of the genre, the needs it meets and the inherent ideological biases about race, gender and civic instruction.

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