



Book Review of Good courts: the case for problem solving justice

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Good courts: the case for problem solving justice. By Greg Berman and John Feiblantt (Eds.), New York, N. Y: The New Press, 2005. pp. xiii, 237.

This book is about a quiet revolution among American Criminal Courts. Criminal courts is at an all-time low: victims, communities and even offenders view courts as unable to respond adequately to complex social and legal problems including drugs, prostitution, domestic violence and quality-of-life crime. Even many judges and attorneys in the U.S. think that the courts produce assembly-line justice. This book describes problem-solving courts, which offer an effective alternative and which are increasingly being embraced by even the most hard-on-crime jurists.

Greg Berman and John Feinblatt were instrumental in setting up New York's midtown community court and the Red Hook Community Justice Center-two of the nation's premier models for problem-solving justice-these alternative courts reengineer the way everyday crime is addressed by focusing on the underlying problems that bring people into the criminal justice system to begin with.

In this book, there are seven chapters and conclusion. Chapter one addresses justice in crisis: why change is necessary. This chapter takes a hard look at the current state of American Criminal Courts. Chapter two describes the problem-solving alternative and explores the intellectual foundations of this new movement. The problem-solving movement represents a pastiche of good ideas and interesting strategies borrowed from other disciplines and other movements, including alternative dispute resolution, the victims' movement, reforms like problem-oriented and broken-windows policing, therapeutic jurisprudence, and juvenile court. In both theory and in practice, these developments have set the stage for problem-solving courts. Chapter three offers a snapshot of several problem-solving courts in action, providing case studies of three primary types of community courts-drug courts, domestic-violence courts, and community courts -Two in New York and one in Oregon-whose stories paint a vivid picture of problem-solving justice in action. Chapter four takes a look at how problem-solving justice affects the work of judges, with a particular focus on issues of judicial discretion, neutrality, impartiality, and independence. Chapter five tells the stories of four

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individuals including a victim and several offenders whose lives were changed for the better by problem-solving courts—a community court, drug court and domestic-violence court. Both of chapter six and chapter seven deal with the issues of effectiveness and fairness, detailing the results that problem-solving courts have achieved and the principal criticism they have generated. Because the problem-solving movement is still relatively young, the state of knowledge in the field changes on almost a daily basis, with a new evaluation or scholarly article being published nearly every week. Chapter six and seven are, of necessity, snapshots of a moving target. Chapter six examines the issues of effectiveness; the authors review the record of problem-solving courts with regard to both preserving order and protecting rights.

Chapter seven examines the issues of fairness responding to the following questions: Have problem-solving courts altered the due-process protections found in today's criminal courts? What has their impact been on the adversarial process and the role of attorneys? Do they expose defendants to increased coercion? Do such courts widen the net of social control, bringing vulnerable populations (minorities, youth, homeless) into the criminal justice system that would not otherwise find themselves under the authority of the state?

In conclusion, **Greg Berman and John Feinblatt** offers some thoughts about future applications of the problem-solving approach. Finally, this book is the first to describe this cutting-edge movement in detail, *Good courts* draws on the American experiences of the Midtown and Red Hook models as well as problem-solving courts in Portland, Oregon, and elsewhere.

Greg Berman and John Feinblatt reviews the growing body of evidence that the problem-solving approach to justice is indeed producing heartening—and replicable—results around the country. This book is an attempt to describe the history, objectives, and achievements of a national movement toward "problem-solving justice" that, in just a little more than a decade, has moved from a handful of isolated projects to the brinks of achieving real and lasting change within the judiciary. Problem-solving justice is an umbrella term that describes a wide range of specialized courtroom that are working to ensure not just that the punishment fits the crime (as courts have always tried to do, with varying degrees of success) but that the process fits the problem. These innovative courts encourage judges and attorneys to think of themselves as problem solvers rather than as simply case processors. With this book, the authors hope to provide a theoretical and historical framework for problem-solving justice, describing what it is, where it came from, and where it may be headed.

Good courts is a well informed and well argued book that should be welcome as a substantial contribution to scholarship on American courts. This work is a very timely and informative addition to the literature on criminal justice. The pages that constitute this book make the case for problem-solving justice, offering a glimpse of what may well turn out to be the future of the American judiciary.