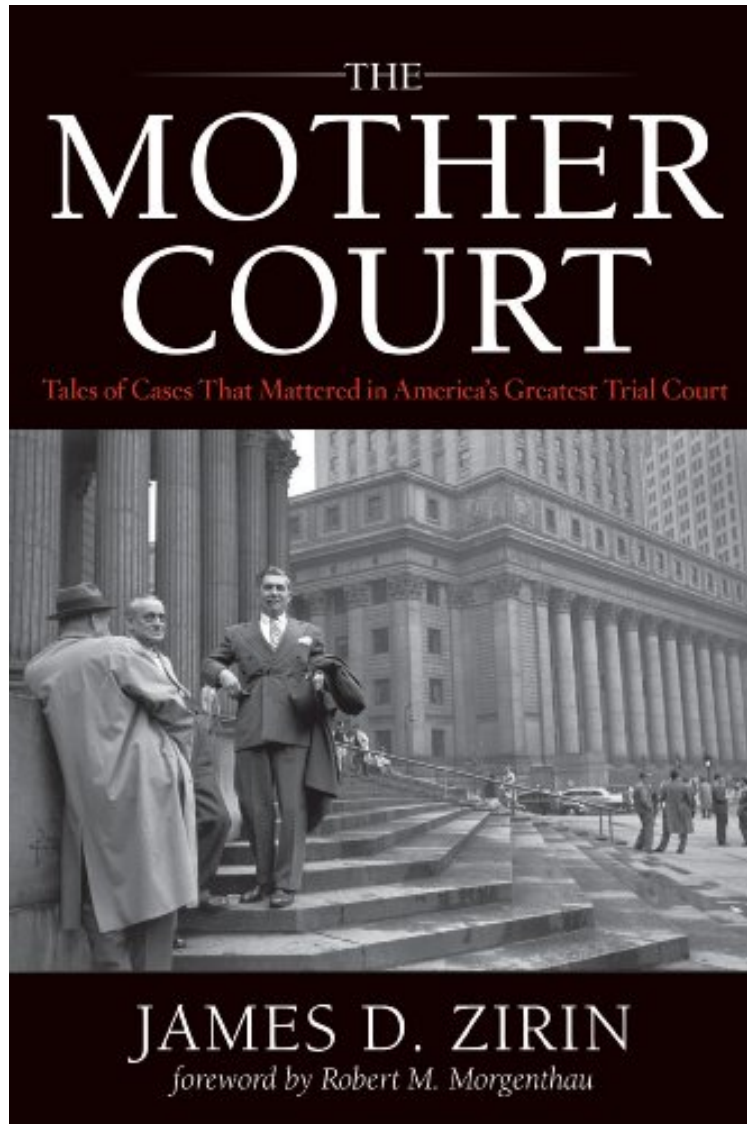


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The Mother Court: Tales of Cases that Mattered in America's Greatest Trial Court

James D. Zirin

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James D. Zirin : The Mother Court: Tales of Cases that Mattered in America's Greatest Trial Court before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Mother Court: Tales of Cases that Mattered in America's Greatest Trial Court:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A bit like an overlong retirement speech; but the last 2/3 of the book is much better than the first 1/3 By Eric Williams The author is an accomplished, highly literate, and interesting man.

His book is a little spotty but has its moments. It's more of a personal reminiscence of his decades practicing there than an overall history, but I think that the personal approach was more interesting than a detached history might have been. Things do get off to a pretty slow start that drag on for several chapters. Few will be much interested in shout-outs to lawyers and secretaries he worked with decades ago, and his stilted and clichéd tributes to "the jury" and the "lost art of cross-examination" (which he does little to explain, despite devoting a whole chapter to it) threatened to spike my little project of reading his book. And I admit to being annoyed by the continual references in this book to the always-capitalized "Mother Court." One strange feature of this book is its frequent use of footnotes throughout, which tend to either be uninformative, or contain the seeds to stories as interesting if not more than the text. This would have been a better book without the footnotes. Fortunately, when you reach Chapter 5, Zirin starts describing notable cases that passed through the court, and his style gets a lot more crisp and interesting. He must have been a heck of a practicing lawyer, as you can surmise by how good he is at depicting the essence of many of these cases. He retells even quite familiar material like the Rosenberg and Alger Hiss trials in a fresh and interesting manner. As the book approached its end, I enjoyed his descriptions of long-ago judges on the Southern District court, most of whom I had never heard of. They must have made quite an impression on a young government lawyer. Zirin's book is published by the ABA, and it is sprinkled with approving references to positions held by the ABA and many of its top officers; so, you may find yourself suddenly transported from a trial of Communists to a self-satisfied, and borderline smug, passage saying that trials of terrorists in the "Mother Court" would be vastly superior to Guantanamo hearings. My difficulty there is not that these assertions of Zirin's are necessarily right or wrong, but that they are unprovable preferences that he wrongly considers conclusively established from his own premises. I found this habit of his a little jarring, but I guess if you agree with his conclusions you might find it soothing. At times I felt like another edition of the ABA Journal had arrived and gotten mixed in with the book I was reading. If you have a long flight or a bit of down time, and are interested in a little law-related reading, this should fit the bill. It did for me. It's a fast read, and you can skim through the parts you are less interested in and plug back in to other chapters with no loss of understanding. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. It's an extremely readable book--a bit like sitting with a good friend who's a fine raconteur ...By MGW This is a first-class book. It's not a rigorous history of Federal District Court for the Southern District of New York, nor is it a rigorous analysis of the cases decided there. Rather, it's a little of everything--an appreciation of the court and the lawyers and judges who practice there, an appreciation of the factors that affect the administration of justice in the court, and a history and analysis of some cases (grouped by important categories) tried in the court. It's an extremely readable book--a bit like sitting with a good friend who's a fine raconteur and listening to engrossing tales about the court. The book will appeal to lawyers and non-lawyers alike and is informative, thoughtful and great fun. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The Mother Court, a good read By Richard Craig Books written by doctors about medicine and other books by lawyers about the law generally pain me, usually because they are written by individuals who are not writers. It takes well written material to hold my interest and attention. The Mother Court not only has a rich load of information, details involving court cases most of us have known about through the media though Zirin peels the onion, layer after layer, revealing the most interesting details of court actions that have had long term effects on most of our lives, but also, he writes remarkably well. As they say, he bares the devils in the details. A book well worth the time taken to read.

This is the first book to chronicle the history of the US District Court for the Southern District of New York, the most influential District court in the United States, from the perspective of a practicing attorney who has argued many cases before some of its most esteemed judges. It gives first-hand insight into the evolution of our justice system where it has been, where it is now and where it is going. It provides an anatomy of what a trial is all about in an American courtroom, featuring the most famous trials of the period in the greatest court in the nation. It gives the reader a taste of what the storied judges of the period Weinfeld, Murphy, Mansfield, Tyler, Motley and Palmieri, to name a few were all about, how they thought, how they judged, and why they were the worthy keepers of our sacred right to justice, as well as the historical traditions of the Court.

This lively account of a half-century of history of the nation's oldest, and perhaps its most exciting, trial court, chronicling the Communist trials of the hysterical McCarthy era, the exposing of America to the literature of sex, prosecutions of Mafia cartels, and sensational libel cases, is peppered with the perceptive observations of a wise, experienced litigator like flakes of chili and oregano on the choicest New York pizza. (Pierre N. Leval, United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit) A delightful, intelligent read. Jim Zirin's sparkling account of life in the Second Circuit's famed MOTHER COURT is informative, riveting, accessible, and uplifting. It would be criminal not to read this book. (Linda Fairstein) A round of applause for James Zirin's Mother Court, a story engagingly, articulately and above all lovingly told. 'We had the experience but missed the meaning' a T.S. Eliot quote cited in the book could not be more apt. Through Mr. Zirin's eyes we do indeed come to appreciate the lasting contribution of our day-to-day Southern District encounters to the quality of our lives and fabric of our society. (Judith Kaye, former chief judge, New York State Court of Appeals) The Southern District of New York has been ground zero for many of this nation's

most famous and infamous courtroom dramas. Now Jim Zirin has given this extraordinary court the history it has long deserved. His narrative sparkles with colorful characters, compelling stories, and legal insights, all rendered in clear prose that will delight lawyers and laymen alike. (Christopher L. Eisgruber, president, Princeton University) Zirin has all the skills vital to a good raconteur: an eye for the telling detail and for the quirks that make humans fascinating to other humans, a sense of humor, a brisk narrative style. Wrap these together and apply them to a court that has been host to most of the most exciting and evocative trials in the last century of American history, and you have a marvelous read. (Stephen F. Williams, United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit) Every wannabe lawyer, practicing lawyer and anyone who wants a riveting and revealing read about legendary lawyers and cases should get this book. Mother Court bristles with inspiring, amusing and embarrassing actions and antics of lawyers and clients in some of the nation's most celebrated cases. Thanks to Jim Zirin, what happened behind the scenes in Manhattan's Southern District no longer stays there. (Joseph A. Califano, Jr.) Jim Zirin reminds us that 'the art of being a trial lawyer is the art of telling a story.' He has certainly learnt his craft, because the stories that he tells in Mother Court are riveting. They are also rich in the deep lessons of the law, the weave of high principle and human frailty, the fierce urgency of a courtroom confrontation and the deliberate and eternal search for justice. (Anne-Marie Slaughter, dean of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University) Can a lawyer love a court? Jim Zirin does, and in this delightful book often rollicking, sometimes pensive, always perceptive he tells tales of the Pentagon Papers, the Rosenbergs, Roy Cohn, distinguished judges and extinguished mobsters, all as they appeared in the sovereign republic of the Southern District. Zirin has a lot to teach about lawyering and judging, and he makes it a pleasure to learn. (Scott Malcomson, former editor, New York Times Magazine Diplo: Towards more inclusive and effective diplomacy) Jim Zirin's *The Mother Court* is a 'must read' for anyone who knows or cares about the American system of justice. It's a compelling view of the federal courthouse in New York's Foley Square for those of us who've spent time there reminding us of things we saw and showing us much that we didn't. In the end, this book is a testament to the Rule of Law and all that it means for our way of life. (David Westin, former president, ABC News) The Mother Court offers a window into the American justice system. Zirin combines colorful historical narrative with personal experience and keen expertise in lawyering, taking us inside the world of one of America's most important set of trial courts. (Matthew Waxman) Colorful anecdotes, thorough research and incisive observations make the book a great read. Zirin's rich professional background and personal experiences practicing in "The Mother Court" allow him to speak with authority. (Michael F. Armstrong, former district attorney, Queens County, NY) The Mother Court is a witty and wide-ranging portrayal of a court and the players who strut and fret their hour across its stage. But it is also a tale about the principled practice of law. It is elegantly told by an expert, intensely loyal and convinced with reason that the adversarial system delivers justice in the vast majority of cases ensuring, as he puts it, criminals are brought to swift and certain justice, while mere rascals are acquitted. How this is achieved, despite the imperfections of any system and its actors, is of vital interest to lawyers and the public alike. (Times London) About the Author James D. Zirin, is the host of Conversations in the Digital Age television talk show, and lives in New York City.