

Book Review: The Lawyers, by Martin Mayer

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Book Review

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THE LAWYERS. MARTIN MAYER. Harper & Row, New York 1967 pp. 586 (\$11.25).

Scholarly enquiry into the legal profession has noticeably quickened in the last several years. This interest reflects both a new awareness of the full social range of the American lawyer's functions and the paucity of research into the sociology of the legal profession.¹ As the study of law increasingly touches the boundaries of the social sciences, information relating to the practical role of the legal practitioner should be welcomed by the profession and by the scholar. Though the sociologist's findings are often of widespread use, his data is often couched in a form which the layman finds too technical or statistical to fathom easily. Aware of this necessary limitation to the academic's research and of the widespread interest in the American legal profession, Martin Mayer has attempted a panoramic survey of the lawyer which can be understood by an interested public. Mayer claims that with this volume he has ventured into the "big leagues" and he brings to his task a thorough apprenticeship in the "minor leagues", having previously x-rayed *The Schools; Wall Street: Men and Money*; and *Madison Avenue, U.S.A.* His techniques and format are well developed, and are essentially those first perfected by John Gunther in his "Inside" books: the skilful arrangement of thousands of anecdotes, statistics, quotations and interviews into a cohesive lengthy, and often entertaining book.

The Lawyers is sectioned into four parts. The first of these is a rambling background to the profession. It includes a crisply written if unduly enthusiastic portrayal of legal education: "Law school

teaching is on the average, especially in the first year, more intense and more intelligent teaching than is offered in any other variety of academic institution in the United States", and a less rewarding excursion into "Jurisprudence: Where the Laws Come From". The core of the volume lies in the second and third parts. When Mayer utilizes his considerable journalistic skills to tackle the problem of what lawyers do and to sketch the physical and social milieu within which they work, his book attracts attention and comes to life. In due course he examines criminal practice, personal injury work, corporate law, the peculiar tasks of the Washington lawyer, and a variety of less popular specialties; admiralty lawyers, labor work, patent lawyers and bankruptcy practices. Each of these chapters consists of a survey of the law in the field, a description of the practitioner in the specialty, and a discourse on what might loosely be termed "what's wrong with the law". Often, Mayer's historical surveys tend to be turbid, and his concluding comments tired. Where he enters into an analysis of trends in the law, the reader in the profession will certainly fidget and yawn. But the descriptions sparkle. It is here that Mayer can give full vent to his anecdotal abilities and to his power of smooth organization. The pages dealing with the lawyer's daily work are fascinating and are difficult to leave. The final part of *The Lawyers* is in the main devoted to the function of the courts, but it is notable chiefly for its chapter on the large legal publishers. The influence of these firms on the development of the law is little explored and this chapter is extremely informative.

Mayer's work is valuable for the good reason that no other popular study is available. The law student and those contemplating entering the law should find it helpful, and the practitioner should find the volume occasionally entertaining. The sociologist or any other person more than casually interested in the relationship between law and society will find Mayer's "*The Lawyers*" to be of limited value. But this is not the audience towards which the author directs his work: it should not be judged by this standard.

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