

Yeshiva University, Cardozo School of Law

## LARC @ Cardozo Law

---

Articles

Staff

---

2019

### Review: Furious Hours: Murder, Fraud, and the Last Trial of Harper Lee by Casey Cep

Christine Anne George  
christine.george@yu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://larc.cardozo.yu.edu/staff-articles>



Part of the [Law Librarianship Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

George, Christine Anne, "Review: Furious Hours: Murder, Fraud, and the Last Trial of Harper Lee by Casey Cep" (2019). *Articles*. 1.

<https://larc.cardozo.yu.edu/staff-articles/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Staff at LARC @ Cardozo Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in Articles by an authorized administrator of LARC @ Cardozo Law. For more information, please contact [larc@yu.edu](mailto:larc@yu.edu).

chapters layers additional constructs of thinking about types of legal research issues and the sources and systems that might resolve them. Given Callister's prior research on metacognition (thinking about how one thinks about a particular subject or skill set), this structure seems appropriate to his constructivist approach to instruction. The structure seems ideal for his target audience but is likely to be too advanced for the law student being introduced to legal research. However, the concepts and approach make this a great resource for instructors of basic legal research who can add modeling (e.g., demonstrating the proper use of West's Key Number System) and scaffolding (the gradual removal of prompts or hand-holding as students develop greater knowledge and skills) to help students crawl, then walk, and finally run.

¶28 I particularly like that each chapter, to varying degrees, integrates multiple resources or approaches instead of treating resource types like disconnected silos of information. As described in the *Field Guide's* introduction, this book is not comprehensive but a resource that can be quickly read and digested by a busy professional who needs to become more efficient and successful in legal research. As such, this book does not provide detailed descriptions of (nearly) all available resources, as other legal research texts do, but is ideal for sharpening the skills of a practitioner.

¶29 The *Field Guide to Legal Research* fills a niche need in legal research instruction—a refresher for those familiar with legal research but not expert in it. If used by an instructor for an advanced legal research course or a prepare-to-practice course, this book and its teacher's manual will make it easier to incorporate proven pedagogical methods in the classroom. The *Field Guide* is ideal not only for the academic law library but also for law firm and court libraries and even the practitioner's shelf. I highly recommend it.

Cep, Casey. *Furious Hours: Murder, Fraud, and the Last Trial of Harper Lee*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019. 336p. \$26.95.

*Reviewed by Christine Anne George\**

¶30 Casey Cep wrote an absolutely fantastic book that I could not help but devour, and I am so furious with her I can barely stand it. I should not be. After all, Cep laid out the entire book in the final lines of the prologue:

One of the state's best trial lawyers was arguing one of the state's strangest cases, and the state's most famous author was there to write about it. . . . The mystery in the courtroom that day was what would become of the man who shot the Reverend Willie Maxwell. But for decades after the verdict, the mystery was what became of Harper Lee's book. (p.4)

I should have known what I was getting into, but Cep so deftly unraveled the tale, strand by strand, that I forgot what I had known before I cracked the spine of Cep's book—Harper Lee had never published her own true crime book. It is entirely Cep's fault that I felt that loss so acutely.

¶31 *Furious Hours* is structured in three parts: “The Reverend,” “The Lawyer,” and “The Writer.” It begins in a straightforward manner with an introduction to

---

\* © Christine Anne George, 2019. Assistant Director for Faculty & Scholarly Services and Editorial Coordinator, Chutick Law Library, Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, Yeshiva University, New York, New York.

Willie Maxwell, a sometime preacher who, as it turns out, had a proclivity for purchasing life insurance on relatives—who then wound up dead. Beginning with the death of his first wife, there was a whiff of suspicion around Maxwell. Something did not seem quite right. The deaths continued, as did the insurance payouts. With law enforcement and insurance agencies scrambling to find something that would stick to Reverend Maxwell, those around him began to feel concerned. With life insurance far less regulated than it is now, it was entirely possible for someone like Maxwell to take out a policy on someone without their knowing. Maxwell's narrative comes to an abrupt end when the relative of one of his alleged victims kills him at said victim's funeral.

¶32 "The Lawyer" shifts the narrative from Maxwell to Tom Radney, Mr. Alabama Democrat, who had the distinction of being Maxwell's attorney and then, upon Maxwell's death, becoming the attorney for the man who shot Maxwell, Robert Burns. "The Lawyer" shifts back in time, giving Radney's backstory before diving into Burns's murder trial. It becomes apparent from the start that Radney is a larger-than-life character. One would have to be to employ the trial strategy of demonizing a former client to acquit a current client. While "The Reverend" lays out the facts about Willie Maxwell and his alleged victims, "The Lawyer" is about the spin. This part does not shy away from the uncomfortable question of Radney's own culpability in benefiting from Maxwell's insurance policy schemes. This case had everything—family drama, revenge, murder, and voodoo. As the verdict is handed down at the end of "The Lawyer," a lingering feeling develops that this couldn't possibly be the end of the story. Enter "The Writer."

¶33 Harper Lee was beyond qualified to tell the story of Maxwell, Burns, and Radney. This is made abundantly clear when Cep once again circles back in time to give Lee's backstory before her decision to recount the Maxwell case. I had not realized how little I knew about Nelle Harper Lee, but if there is one thing "The Writer" makes clear, this anonymity was wholly by Lee's design. Those closest to her were not ever to mention *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but were more than likely to hear the author complain about her tax bracket. Much like Scout, Lee had lawyers in the family—her father and sister—so she had heard about court cases from a young age. She had even attended law school, but dropped out just shy of graduation to write instead. After the struggle to create *Mockingbird*—along with the never-to-be-mentioned-in-this-review-again *Go Set a Watchman*, which had come first—Lee went on a trip with her lifelong friend Truman Capote to Kansas to act as his "researchist." The things Lee learned while working on what would become *In Cold Blood* would pave the way for how she approached the Maxwell case. It was a long time coming after *Mockingbird*, but Lee's new work, which she called *The Reverend*, was set to be a blockbuster.

¶34 When immersed in the pages of a book, sometimes reality slips away. You get so caught up in the story that you forget things you know are true. Within *Furious Hours*, many of the people involved are caught up in stories. *Willie Maxwell killed before, and I could be next. All of my clients are innocent. Nelle's new book will be finished any day now. Harper Lee is going to tell my story, and Gregory Peck will play me in the movie.* Are they true? Maybe Willie Maxwell really did kill five relatives for insurance money. Maybe it was a strange series of coincidences. There is no way to know. What we do know is that Lee did not publish her book. We do not know whether she even wrote it because her archives are sealed. What we do know

is that there was a very unusual case, one alleged murderer, one confessed murderer, lots of insurance money, an over-the-top defense attorney, and one woman who could spin the tale. Cep's brilliance is that she makes you realize what could have been, which is entirely enraging because with that realization comes the knowledge that it will never be.<sup>1</sup>

¶35 *Furious Hours* is highly recommended for academic and university libraries.

Goldstein, Paul. *Copyright's Highway: From the Printing Press to the Cloud, Second Edition*. Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2019. 240p. \$25 Paperback, \$85 Cloth.

*Reviewed by Elizabeth Manriquez\**

¶36 Professor Paul Goldstein returns with a new edition of his well-known book, *Copyright's Highway*,<sup>2</sup> and takes the reader on an enjoyable journey through the history of intellectual property, with pit stops at all the important landmarks.

¶37 Goldstein, the Lillick Professor of Law at Stanford University, is a world-renowned expert on intellectual property and the author of several treatises and books on the subject. In this latest monograph, he deftly weaves the history of copyright with digestible explanations of basic concepts in intellectual property law. He manages to simultaneously entertain and educate as he leads us through the conception of intellectual property rights to current challenges facing the copyright industry, such as the advent of digitization and the open source movement. Well researched, with ample citations and documentation, *Copyright's Highway* draws the reader into the judicial and legislative dramas that shaped our modern-day intellectual property laws, both domestic and international.

¶38 The book begins with "[t]he metaphysics of copyright" (p.1), an explanation of the competing interests involved in copyright law. Goldstein posits a "battle" between "'natural rights' for the optimists, [and] 'individual freedoms' for the pessimists" (p.10). He then details the history of intellectual property rights, beginning with the Statute of Anne in eighteenth century England, and how these rights have been apportioned between the author, the printer/publisher, and the consumer throughout the centuries. He explains both the American conception of copyright and the European conception, which vary greatly as reflected in their respective legislation on the issues.

¶39 Perhaps the greatest distinction Goldstein draws between the domestic understanding of copyright and the international approach are the competing concepts of ownership and authorship. While domestic legislation often involves the parceling of rights in a similar manner to real property, international laws instead focus on the moral right of authorship. Goldstein argues that if copyright is to survive, Americans need to refocus attention on this right of authorship, the face of

---

1. Cep notes in her epilogue, "Nelle Harper Lee's estate is sealed. The entirety of her literary assets, including whatever else exists of *The Reverend*, remains unpublished and unknown" (p.276). So perhaps my "never" is tempting fate.

\* © Elizabeth Manriquez, 2019. Scholarly Communications and Reference Librarian, University of Wisconsin Law School Library, Madison, Wisconsin.

2. PAUL GOLDSTEIN, *COPYRIGHT'S HIGHWAY: FROM GUTENBERG TO THE CELESTIAL JUKEBOX* (1994, rev. ed. 2003).