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## No One Will Lissen

Mabel Minor

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## BOOK REVIEW

*No One Will Lissen*. By Lois G. Forer, New York: The John Day Company, 1970. Pp. 352. \$8.95.

Upon graduation from law school, Lois G. Forer joined the legal staff of the United States Senate Committee on Education and Labor. She was a lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania Law School, before becoming Deputy Attorney General of Pennsylvania. Mrs. Forer was a lawyer in the Philadelphia Office for Juveniles.

"The juvenile court is a special agency to determine whether the best interests of a child and the State require the care, guidance and control of such child" (p. 37). This determination is made by the *parens patriae*, juvenile court judge, at a hearing, the purpose of which is to decide whether it is in the best interests of the child and the community to deprive him of his liberty (p. 39). These brief hearings are conducted without any rules of procedure or evidence.

*No One Will Lissen* is an in depth study of the juvenile court system in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This book is not based on research, but on the personal experiences of Lois Forer.

Theoretically, the legal system of the United States grants justice for all its people. However, this theory can readily be disproved by the countless cases of juveniles who are arrested for committing such undefined crimes as incorrigibility. Can justice be constructed as an arrest without the juvenile being told the charge, as an incarceration with little effort to notify the parents or guardians of the juvenile concerning his arrest, as a trial before a *parens patriae* without the benefit of counsel, and as a commitment to an institution for rehabilitation without sufficient evidence to find the juvenile guilty of the crime charged? According to the cases discussed in this book, there is no justice for juveniles who are members of the minority, the poor, and those ignorant of their rights as citizens of the United States. When the juvenile is arrested, he is not informed of the charge, of the constitutional right against self-incrimination, of the right to counsel, nor of the right to appeal, those safeguards which were established for juveniles by the *Gault* Case (p. 289). Without the knowledge of one's rights, the juvenile cannot have a fair hearing. When a juvenile gives his version of the occurrence, the results are as if he were talking to

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no one. The main concern of the *parens patriae* is the disposal of cases, not what the juvenile is saying. No counsel is representing the juvenile because he is not aware of his right to be represented.

Truancy is one of the main causes of commitment to jail for poor black teen-agers who are usually not formally charged with truancy on the delinquency petition. But if there is some evidence that a child may be guilty of an offense, a poor school record is often the determining factor in the decision to institutionalize him (p. 258). Is a poor school record evidence of the commission of a crime or is it the evidence of an ineffective school system?

On the other hand, the middle- and upper-classes of teen-agers commit the same offenses as lower class teen-agers, but there is a distinct advantage—money. Either the juvenile is returned home in the custody of his parents or the parents pay for the offense committed. This is the present system of justice in the United States, definitely unfair, but the poor cannot be heard above the middle class and upper class.

Mrs. Forer has done an exceptional job of exposing the problems of the juvenile court system. Now the question is—will anyone listen and attempt to reform the system?

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