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Rodger D. Citron

Touro Law Center, rcitron@tourolaw.edu

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NINE WAYS OF LOOKING AT OKLAHOMA CITY: AN ESSAY ON SAM ANDERSON’S *BOOM TOWN*

Rodger D. Citron*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Many of the crises of 2020—the pandemic, the challenges to electoral democracy, the nationwide protests over police misconduct—call into question who we are now in the United States and what our future will be. The *Tulsa Law Review* is to be commended for exploring our past, specifically the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, to help answer these

* Rodger D. Citron is the Associate Dean for Research and Scholarship and a Professor of Law at Touro College, Jacob D. Fuchsberg Law Center. He thanks Professor Warigia Bowman for thoughtful comments on a prior draft of this essay. He also thanks Andrea Cohen, Bill Petersen, and Irene McDermott and her excellent staff in the law library for their time and help along the way.

questions.¹ Law will be central to determining our response to these crises and shaping our future. It always is in the United States.

For law professors, a critical issue is how we should educate our students so that they are able to address today's challenges. The events of 2020 sent me back to a question I have wrestled with over the years as a law professor: To what extent should we integrate non-legal texts into our doctrinal courses? This question is central to the Law and Literature class. For courses at the core of the law school curriculum, however, non-legal texts—something other than casebooks organized around judicial decisions—rarely move beyond the periphery of the class.

For example, I teach Civil Procedure. Occasionally I have assigned a book about a case² to situate the material in the context of a case. As the students read about a case as it unfolds, they develop a richer understanding of the strategic and ethical choices attorneys have to make when litigating a civil case. To be clear, the book supplements the material covered in a casebook.

Now I am thinking about how to incorporate Sam Anderson's *Boom Town*³ into the law school curriculum. It is a superb book. Anderson began working on it in 2012, initially as a magazine article about the Oklahoma City Thunder, the city's professional basketball team. The more he visited Oklahoma City, the more he saw the Thunder as a metaphor for the history of the city. Anderson's article grew into a book about the city created in 1889 after the Oklahoma Land Run. Oklahoma City, which aspires to be the premier second-tier metropolis in the United States, has had more than its share of tragedies and triumphs. The bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah federal building in 1995 still haunts the memories of residents who lived through it. Ralph Ellison, author of *Invisible Man*, grew up in and drew inspiration from Oklahoma City. Tornadoes are common and can be life-threatening. All of these stories and others intersect in this excellent book.

This essay about *Boom Town* has a number of aims. Borrowing from Wallace Stevens, it shows how Anderson's book gives us a number of ways of looking at Oklahoma City.⁴ As the essay details, many of these views are relevant to the law school curriculum. In discussing them, it emphasizes the history of race relations set out in Anderson's account. The events of 2020 have prompted (re)consideration of how race and racism have shaped and continue to shape the law.⁵ This essay has the dual purpose of not only making the case for *Boom Town* as a non-legal text to enrich coverage of material in a number of law school courses, it also shows how the book can be used to situate that material in the historical context of race relations.

1. As William Faulkner wrote, "[t]he past is never dead. It's not even past." WILLIAM FAULKNER, *REQUIEM FOR A NUN* (1950).

2. *The Buffalo Creek Disaster* when I began teaching in 2004, then *A Civil Action*, and, most recently, *Storming the Court*. See GERALD STERN, *THE BUFFALO CREEK DISASTER* (1976); JONATHAN HARR, *A CIVIL ACTION* (1995); BRAND GOLDSTEIN, *STORMING THE COURT* (2006).

3. SAM ANDERSON, *BOOM TOWN: THE FANTASTICAL SAGA OF OKLAHOMA CITY, ITS CHAOTIC FOUNDING, ITS APOCALYPTIC WEATHER, ITS PURLOINED BASKETBALL TEAM, AND THE DREAM OF BECOMING A WORLD-CLASS METROPOLIS* (2018).

4. See Wallace Stevens, *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*, POETRY FOUND. (1954), <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45236/thirteen-ways-of-looking-at-a-blackbird>.

5. See, e.g., Yale University Journal on Regulation Symposium: Racism in Administrative Law (2020), available at <https://www.yalejreg.com/topic/racism-in-administrative-law-symposium/>.

Before turning to the first view, a threshold question must be addressed. Why Oklahoma City? In the prologue, Anderson writes:

From a distance, Oklahoma City looked like almost nothing. Up close, it turned out to be about almost everything. It became obvious immediately that the new basketball team was deeply entangled in every other aspect of the place – its politics, its history, its economics, its weather – and that this nexus of Oklahoma things was further inextricable from an even larger nexus: certain fundamental tensions in the DNA of democracy itself.⁶

Per the author, as Oklahoma goes, so goes the nation. This essay makes the case for including *Boom Town* in the law school curriculum at schools not just in Oklahoma but across the United States as well.

II. THE LAND RUN, PART I: A PROPERTY ORIGINS STORY

Anderson begins the story of Oklahoma City before Oklahoma became a State. “In 1880, Oklahoma still did not exist,” he writes.⁷ Back then the area was known “Indian Territory.”⁸ Essentially, for decades “the U.S. government had been using Oklahoma as a storage area for its dispossessed indigenous peoples.”⁹ After the Civil War, as Anderson describes, the United States seized land that belonged to Creek and Seminole Indians after the tribes sided with the South during the Civil War.¹⁰ “The Unassigned Lands,” as this area came to be known, was sought after by people in bordering states.¹¹ After years of inaction, the federal government decided to hold what is known as the Land Run on April 22, 1889.¹²

Allow Anderson to elaborate:

The Land Run should be called something like “Chaos Explosion Apocalypse Town” or “Reckoning of the Doomsettlers: Clusterfuck on the Prairie” . . . [T]he Land Run was, even by the standards of America, absurd. It was a very bad idea, executed very badly. It would be hard to think of a worse way to start a city.¹³

By announcing that free land would be available to whoever arrived first after the bugle sounded at noon, the Land Run was government-organized chaos.¹⁴ Anderson teases out the mayhem, interspersing chapters on the build-up to the event with chapters on other Oklahoma City-related subjects (such as the Thunder’s decision to draft James Harden in 2009). Just one anecdote from *Boom Town*: As people poured into Oklahoma City on the first day of its existence, the “townsite had only one well, and an enterprising settler cornered it immediately, standing on top of it, guns drawn.”¹⁵ He charged five cents for a drink—an outrageous price. Eventually, Anderson writes, the army seized the well and

6. ANDERSON, *supra* note 3, at xvii.

7. *Id.* at 21.

8. *Id.*

9. *Id.*

10. *Id.* at 22.

11. ANDERSON, *supra* note 3, at 22.

12. *Id.* at 35–36.

13. *Id.* at 36.

14. *Id.*

15. ANDERSON, *supra* note 3, at 67.

returned it to the public.¹⁶

The story of the Land Run is an ideal way to start the Property course. Decades ago, when I was in law school, the course began with a discussion of *Pierson v. Post*, an early nineteenth century case involving a dispute between two men over who possessed the fox that one had been pursuing when the other one killed it.¹⁷ (Answer: the latter, Pierson). The case is still taught on the first day of Property in some law schools today. *Pierson* is an interesting, vivid case, with a majority opinion and a dissent that lends itself to debate.

Nonetheless, instead of starting Property with a case about a dispute over ownership, imagine instead assigning an excerpt from *Boom Town* and starting the first day of class with the following question: “How should the federal government have conducted the Land Run?” The Land Run (re)focuses the foundational property story, from one involving two private citizens fighting over who is the rightful owner of a thing to how the federal government should have organized the allocation of a limited resource—land. Which story is more relevant today? Pedagogically, which story is more likely to generate discussion over how government may regulate private property?

III. THE LAND RUN, PART II: WHO WAS EXCLUDED FROM THE LAND RUN?

There is another reason to start the Property class with the Land Run: It puts the issue of race front and center. As Anderson recounts:

The Land Run was for white men. Not officially, in a legal sense, but in practice. The number of African Americans who made the Run . . . was a tiny fraction of the human tide – roughly 100,000 strong – that rushed in that day over the prairie. Given the opportunity the Land Run represented, especially for the poor and marginalized, that absence screams volumes. Oklahoma’s settlers were a heavily armed white mob. Black Americans would have known to proceed with caution.¹⁸

The Land Run occurred during and contributed to a distinctive part of Oklahoma’s history: the development of all-Black towns. According to Larry O’Dell, from “1865 to 1920[,] African Americans created more than fifty identifiable towns and settlements, some of short duration and some still existing at the beginning of the twenty-first century.”¹⁹ After the Civil War, all-Black towns emerged as former slaves settled together in “Indian Territory.”²⁰ Although few African Americans participated in the Land Run, a substantial number “from the Old South rushed to newly created Oklahoma.”²¹

This is a brief essay; a comprehensive account of race relations in the United States is far beyond its scope. Nonetheless, recent events have prompted even greater attention to a fundamental question about the United States: To what extent do race and the history of race relations shape the structure of American society? Law is integral to the organization of and allocation of power and privilege in the United States. By beginning

16. *Id.*

17. *Pierson v. Post*, 3 Cai. R. 175 (N.Y. Sup. Ct. 1805).

18. ANDERSON, *supra* note 3, at 163.

19. Larry O’Dell, *All-Black Towns*, OKLA. HIST. SOC’Y, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=AL009> (last visited Aug. 17, 2021). *See also* NORMAN CROCKETT, *THE BLACK TOWNS* (1979).

20. O’Dell, *supra* note 19.

21. *Id.*

the Property course with the Land Run, it is possible to raise the question of race at the start of the class.

IV. THE BIRTHPLACE OF RALPH ELLISON

Ralph Ellison wrote *Invisible Man*, one of the great novels of the twentieth century.²² He was born in Oklahoma City and grew up in a neighborhood known as Deep Deuce.²³ Anderson recounts that, as “a teenager, Ralph took up the trumpet, and the noise of him practicing out of his open window became part of the soundtrack of the community.”²⁴ Though Ellison left Oklahoma City at the age of nineteen to study at Tuskegee Institute and later moved to New York City, his writings drew deeply upon his experiences in Oklahoma City.²⁵ “The act of writing,” Ellison told the *New Yorker*, “requires a constant plunging back into the shadow of the past where time hovers ghostlike.”²⁶ He added, “I dream constantly of Oklahoma City.”²⁷

Jervis Anderson, author of the *New Yorker* profile published in 1976, noted that Ellison is an optimist.²⁸ He elaborated:

If Ellison . . . is asked to explain the sources of this optimism, he might point to what he has been able to make of his own life. But since he dislikes calling attention to his achievement, he is more than likely to point to his background as an Oklahoman—to the “sense of possibility” he developed while growing up in one of the younger states of the Union. Hardly anyone who has listened to him speaking about the Oklahoma of his boyhood can have failed to come away with the impression that it retains an exceptional influence upon his outlook, and that he continues to harbor an affection for the region which far exceeds what people ordinarily feel for distant places in which they were raised.²⁹

Ellison read widely and learned to play the trumpet while growing up in Oklahoma City.³⁰ In 1933, he left to enroll at Tuskegee on a music scholarship.³¹ Three years later, Ellison traveled to New York City, searching for summer employment.³² He did not make much money that summer and decided to remain in New York rather than return to Tuskegee.³³ Ellison lived most of his life in New York City, though he did serve in the Merchant Marine as a baker and a cook for two years during World War II.³⁴ Ellison drew on all of these experiences when he wrote *Invisible Man*. If one had to summarize the action of the novel in a single sentence, one could say that it is set in the 1930s and tells the story of a young African American man from the South on a journey of self-discovery

22. RALPH ELLISON, *INVISIBLE MAN* (1952).

23. Jervis Anderson, *Ralph Ellison Goes Home*, *THE NEW YORKER*, at 7, 13 (Nov. 15, 1976), <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1976/11/22/going-to-the-territory/amp>.

24. ANDERSON, *supra* note 3, at 192.

25. Anderson, *supra* note 23, at 4, 7–8.

26. *Id.*

27. *Id.* at 4.

28. *Id.* at 3.

29. *Id.*

30. Anderson, *supra* note 23, at 20.

31. *Id.* at 7.

32. *Id.* at 7–8.

33. *Id.* at 8.

34. *Id.*

who leaves his all-Black college before graduating and travels north to New York City.³⁵ There are, broadly speaking, parallels between the author and the protagonist of the novel.

Of course, *Invisible Man* is about many things, including the law.³⁶ The novel could enrich the law school curriculum in courses other than Law and Literature. For example, *Invisible Man* was published in 1952,³⁷ while the legal campaign to dismantle segregation was occurring. Two years after the novel's publication, the Supreme Court decided *Brown v. Board of Education*, holding that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional.³⁸ Professor Alfred Brophy has written that "Invisible Man and the Supreme Court drew upon the common reservoir of cultural opposition to group identity and racial caste."³⁹ At a minimum, an excerpt from the novel would illuminate the world of segregation for students born decades after *Brown* was decided.

V. RACIAL TENSIONS IN THE 1920S

The story of Ellison's upbringing, Anderson writes, includes a glimpse of the Greenwood neighborhood in Tulsa:

[I]n the spring of 1921, Ellison's mother decided that there was no future for her sons in Oklahoma City. The place was too brutal. . . . So she quit her job, sold all the family's furniture, and set off for Gary, Indiana, where her brother worked in a steel mill. On their way north, the Ellisons stopped to visit a cousin in Tulsa. He lived in a neighborhood called Greenwood, and his OKC visitors would have been impressed by a zone of black life so different from Deep Deuce . . .⁴⁰

Life in Gary did not work out for the Ellisons.⁴¹ The steel industry crashed, Ellison's mother was unable to get a job, and the family decided to return to Oklahoma City.⁴² On their way back, "the Ellisons passed once more through Tulsa," Anderson writes.⁴³ "This time, Greenwood was gone."⁴⁴ Between the family's two visits, Anderson recounts, "[t]he apocalypse ensued" in Tulsa in 1921 as "white mobs went to war on Greenwood."⁴⁵

Though Anderson does not discuss the Tulsa Race Massacre in detail, he provides context for understanding it. Oklahoma City experienced the racial tensions that erupted in Tulsa in 1921.⁴⁶ The Ku Klux Klan ("KKK") was a powerful force in electoral politics

35. Albert Murray, a friend of Ellison's and an accomplished author, described *Invisible Man* as "*par excellence* the literary extension of the blues." Anderson, *supra* note 23, at 11. Here is Murray's one-sentence summary of the novel: "It was as if Ellison had taken an everyday twelve-bar blues tune (by a man from down South sitting in a manhole up North in New York singing and signifying about how he got there) and scored it for full orchestra." *Id.*

36. See Alfred Brophy, *Foreword: Ralph Ellison and the Law*, 26 OKLA. CITY U. L. REV. 823 (2001).

37. ELLISON, *supra* note 22.

38. 347 U.S. 483, 495 (1954).

39. Brophy, *supra* note 36, at 827.

40. ANDERSON, *supra* note 3, at 190.

41. *Id.*

42. *Id.*

43. *Id.*

44. *Id.*

45. ANDERSON, *supra* note 3, at 190.

46. *Id.* at 191.

in Oklahoma.⁴⁷ Jack Walton, a Democrat, was elected governor in 1922.⁴⁸ In 1923, Walton declared war on the KKK, establishing martial law in certain places while investigating the Klan.⁴⁹ Later that year, Walton was impeached and convicted by the state legislature and removed from office.⁵⁰ Accordingly, after the Ellisons returned to Oklahoma City, they experienced the racial order of the day, including a Ku Klux Klan parade in which nearly 5,000 “Klansmen marched with torches, American flags, and burning crosses.”⁵¹

VI. ROSCOE DUNJEE & THE LEGAL STRUGGLE FOR DESEGREGATION

In providing a brief history of race relations in Oklahoma City, Anderson describes the relentless efforts of Roscoe Dunjee to desegregate the city. Dunjee was editor of the *Black Dispatch*, the city’s leading Black newspaper.⁵² Segregation was legally entrenched in Oklahoma in the early twentieth century. Dunjee played a critical role in combatting what he called “Negrophobia.”⁵³ He organized efforts to expand the area of Oklahoma City’s Black neighborhood downtown despite the opposition of “a white group called the East Side Civic League mobilized to keep black homeowners in their place.”⁵⁴

For law students studying Constitutional Law, Dunjee’s efforts illuminate the history of the legal campaign to desegregate public education that culminated in *Brown*.⁵⁵ Dunjee started the Oklahoma City chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), organized chapters throughout the State, and developed legal cases that resulted in judicial decisions invalidating Oklahoma laws sanctioning discrimination.⁵⁶ As Anderson elaborates, “Dunjee insisted on funding these causes himself” as “he mortgaged his newspaper headquarters multiple times and accepted donations from readers in pennies.”⁵⁷

“Through Dunjee,” Anderson concludes, “Oklahoma City became the wedge with which the NAACP began to move the laws of the entire nation.”⁵⁸ With respect to public education, Dunjee played a key role in developing two cases that provided precedents for

47. *Id.*

48. Larry O’Dell, *Walton, John Calloway (1881-1949)*, OKLA. HIST. SOC’Y, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=WA014> (last visited Sept. 9, 2021) [hereinafter *John Calloway Walton*].

49. ANDERSON, *supra* note 3, at 191. *Gov. Walton Begins War Against Ku Klux Klan*, TULSA WORLD (Sept. 9, 1923), https://tulsaworld.com/september-9-1923-gov-walton-begins-war-against-ku-klux-klan/article_3eb826ee-6894-11e6-a590-ff407aa1b51a.html.

50. ANDERSON, *supra* note 3, at 191; *John Calloway Walton*, *supra* note 48.

51. ANDERSON, *supra* note 3, at 191.

52. *Id.* at 165. *See also* John F. Callahan, *Ralph Ellison: A Covenant of Blood and the Word*, 26 OKLA. CITY U. L. REV. 839, 852 (2001) (noting that Dunjee was a formative influence on Ralph Ellison).

53. ANDERSON, *supra* note 3, at 165.

54. *Id.* at 192.

55. *See generally* 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

56. John H. L. Thompson, *Dunjee Roscoe (1883-1965)*, OKLA. HIST. SOC’Y, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=DU007> (last visited Aug. 21, 2021); James M. Smallwood, *NAACP*, OKLA. HIST. SOC’Y, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=NA001> (last visited Aug. 21, 2021).

57. ANDERSON, *supra* note 3, at 167.

58. *Id.*

Brown: *Sipuel v. Board of Regents, University of Oklahoma*,⁵⁹ in which the Supreme Court held that the university's law school must accept an African American woman; and *McLaurin v. Oklahoma*,⁶⁰ in which the Court required the university's education school to desegregate. As Oklahoma was required to desegregate, so was the nation.

VII. CLARA LUPER & THE POLITICAL BATTLE FOR DESEGREGATION

The campaign against desegregation in the twentieth century was political as well as legal. Anderson tells the story of Clara Luper and the sit-in campaign she organized to desegregate downtown restaurants.⁶¹ In August 1958, Luper and thirteen children, "all members of the NAACP Youth Council," went in to Katz Drug Store and ordered Cokes.⁶² They were not served. Instead the police came. Then the media arrived. As Anderson recounts, "the police sent the cameras away. This was, in large part, a war of publicity, and the only way to win was to keep it quiet, to let the scandal blow over."⁶³ And, in fact, despite the disrespect shown to the children by white patrons, there was no coverage of the sit-in "in the next day's issue of the *Oklahoman*."⁶⁴

The establishment may have won the battle that day but Luper and the children were undaunted. They came back the next day.⁶⁵ On the day after that, Katz Drug Store relented and announced that it would serve everyone, regardless of race, at its lunch counters—and not just in Oklahoma City, but in all thirty-eight of its stores in four states.⁶⁶ Luper and the children did not stop with their success at Katz, however.⁶⁷ They moved on to the next downtown restaurant.⁶⁸ It took six years to end segregation in Oklahoma City's restaurants.⁶⁹ During that time, Luper was arrested twenty-six times.⁷⁰

In situating these developments in historical context, Anderson notes that Luper and the children sat down at Katz Drug Store more than a year before the well-known sit-ins at Woolworth's in Greensboro, North Carolina that occurred in 1960.⁷¹ He explains that the "PR-conscious local media kept Clara Luper's sit-ins relatively quiet, and the protestors and police managed to work together to avoid any major eruptions of violence."⁷² This is a revealing observation. A defining aspect of establishment Oklahoma City is boosterism—the city celebrates its accomplishments while downplaying or

59. 332 U.S. 631, 632–33 (1948). See also Cheryl Brown Wattley, *Ada Louis Sipuel Fisher: How a 'Skinny Little Girl' Took on the University of Oklahoma and Helped Pave the Road to Brown v. Board of Education*, 62 OKLA. L. REV. 449, 463 (2010).

60. 339 U.S. 637, 642 (1950). See also Alfred Brophy, *When More than Property is Lost: The Dignity Losses and Restoration of the Tulsa Riot of 1921*, 41 L. & SOC. INQUIRY 824, 830 (2016).

61. ANDERSON, *supra* note 3, at 200.

62. *Id.*

63. *Id.* at 201.

64. *Id.*

65. *Id.* at 203.

66. ANDERSON, *supra* note 3, at 203.

67. *Id.*

68. *Id.*

69. *Id.* at 205.

70. *Id.*

71. ANDERSON, *supra* note 3, at 202.

72. *Id.*

avoiding discussion of issues that could detract from its image.

VIII. URBAN RENEWAL AND REDEVELOPMENT

“Urban renewal” is now a controversial phrase. The ambitious efforts in the mid-twentieth century by government and developers to address “urban blight” produced mixed results. Too often efforts to revitalize downtown areas resulted instead in their decimation. Ironically, urban renewal projects in the post-World War II period often contributed to suburban sprawl rather than discouraging it. This history is relevant to the Land Use course taught in law schools. Among other things, downtown revitalization projects today are informed by past failures.

As Anderson describes, Oklahoma City provides a case study of urban renewal pursued with ambitious intentions—in the early 1960s, the city retained I.M. Pei, then a rising star, as its architect—resulting in a devastated downtown.⁷³ Anderson organizes this history around the demolition in 1977 of the Biltmore Hotel, built during the Great Depression when Oklahoma City was enjoying an oil boom.⁷⁴ It was a grand hotel, “with 619 rooms, green stone floors, seven elevators, and an enormous rug in the lobby woven with idealized scenes from the history of OKC.”⁷⁵ About 30,000 people gathered downtown to watch the hotel be demolished in 1977.⁷⁶ Anderson concludes, the “destruction of the Biltmore Hotel would be remembered, for decades, as a turning point in the history of the city. Where that turn led, however, was not at all where the planners had planned.”⁷⁷ Furthermore, as Anderson shows, there was a racial aspect to “urban renewal” in Oklahoma City; as one reviewer of *Boom Town* noted, many of the city’s Black citizens were “corralled . . . into ‘islands’ on the East Side, segregated by freeways and giant corporate parking lots.”⁷⁸

IX. THE 1995 BOMBING AND THE PROSECUTION OF TIMOTHY McVEIGH

One of the challenges Anderson encountered while writing *Boom Town* was how to write about the defining event in Oklahoma City in the twentieth century: Timothy McVeigh’s bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building on April 19, 1995. As the *Washington Post* summarized, it “was the most destructive terrorist attack in the United States before 9/11; 168 people died in the explosion, including 19 out of 21 children in day care.”⁷⁹ Part of the difficulty for the author was that no one who lived through the bombing wanted to talk about it.

73. *Id.* at 254.

74. *Id.* at 259.

75. *Id.* at 250. The scenes included “a tepee, a covered wagon, an oil well, and an image of the Biltmore itself.” *Id.*

76. ANDERSON, *supra* note 3, at 259–60.

77. *Id.* at 262.

78. Carson Vaughn, *Boom Town Explodes the Notion of Flyover Territory*, THE ATLANTIC (Sept. 26, 2018), <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2018/09/boom-town-sam-anderson-oklahoma-city-review/570730/>.

79. David L. Ulin, *Oklahoma City: ‘One of the Great Weirdo Cities’ Carved Out of an Unforgiving Landscape*, WASH. POST (Aug. 24, 2018), https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/oklahoma-city-one-of-the-great-weirdo-cities-carved-out-of-unforgiving-landscape/2018/08/24/51e60a82-a4bb-11e8-97ce-cc9042272f07_story.html.

Anderson solves this challenge by not writing about the bombing until near the end of the book. By then, he has taken the reader through Oklahoma City, so that when he narrates the day of the bombing, every detail is painful because Anderson already has connected you to the people and places he describes.⁸⁰ After describing the day and the rescue efforts that followed, Anderson gives the last word to Clara Luper, on her radio show, three days after the bombing. Anderson writes that it “felt like a church service”:

[Luper] expressed her grief out loud, in public. She wept. She repeated, over and over, a rhythmic refrain: “It happened in the heartland of America.” She asked people of the East to bring food and supplies to the Freedom Center . . . [to] help the rescue workers. . . . At the end of the show, she signed off, simply, with “This is Clara Luper saying, I love you.”⁸¹

McVeigh was apprehended shortly after the bombing during a routine traffic stop.⁸² Subsequently, he was tried on eleven counts in a federal criminal trial, convicted, and sentenced to death in 1997.⁸³ Four years later, after the denial of his appeals, McVeigh was executed in 2001.⁸⁴ His case raises a number of questions for consideration in a Criminal Law or Criminal Procedure course. For example, the case drew enormous media attention. In today’s media-saturated environment, what steps can the trial court take to ensure that a criminal defendant in a sensational case receives a fair trial? The death penalty is still available as a sentence in many states and in certain federal prosecutions. How, if at all, does the McVeigh case influence one’s views on capital punishment? *Boom Town* helps put these questions in context.

X. CIVIC LIFE & MEMORY

Oklahoma City is a dynamic city today with a vibrant downtown. The city recovered from its failed urban renewal efforts undertaken in the 1960s and 1970s. It built a memorial to commemorate the lives of the 168 people who were killed in the bombing of the federal building in 1995.⁸⁵ And Oklahoma City continues to survive the tornados that occasionally whip through the city—Anderson describes the devastation wreaked in 1999 and 2013 by two especially terrifying storms.⁸⁶

Anderson notes that “[e]very time a new player joins the Oklahoma City Thunder, before he ever plays a game, he is required to take a tour of the bombing memorial.”⁸⁷ The team, it is clear, appreciates the history of the city. Anderson makes a persuasive case for the Thunder being an important part of Oklahoma City’s civic fabric—one that helped the city recover from the tragedy of the bombing.⁸⁸ (To be clear, he does not overlook how

80. Politics and Prose, *Sam Anderson, “Boom Town”*, YOUTUBE (Oct. 12, 2018), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lzqk8OoaWYQ&t=57s>. See ANDERSON, *supra* note 3, at 343–55.

81. ANDERSON, *supra* note 3, at 355.

82. *Id.* at 360–61.

83. *Id.* at 361.

84. *Id.* See also *Terror on Trial: Timothy McVeigh Executed*, CNN (Dec. 31, 2007), <http://edition.cnn.com/2007/US/law/12/17/court.archive.mcveigh/>.

85. ANDERSON, *supra* note 3, at 356.

86. *Id.* at 366–86.

87. *Id.* at 356.

88. *Id.* at 357.

the team's owners wrangled the then-Supersonics out of Seattle—not a pretty or commendable story.)⁸⁹ And it would be remiss in this essay not to remind the reader that much of *Boom Town* is, in fact, a sports book about pro basketball. The connection between the city and its pro basketball team prompts one final set of questions, for discussion in the Sports Law course: How do we value a professional sports franchise? To what extent does a professional sports team contribute to its host city? Here again, *Boom Town* provides a case study.

XI. CONCLUSION

Boom Town takes a kaleidoscopic approach to the history of Oklahoma City and how that history informs the life and institutions of the city today. Moreover, *Boom Town* shows how the history of one city is instructive for all of us as we try to understand what the United States has experienced and where it is headed. Law professors could incorporate parts of *Boom Town* in their courses on Property, Constitutional Law, American Legal History, Land Use, Criminal Law and Procedure, and Sports Law.

89. *Id.* at 40–45.