



The Life of the Law: Anthropological Projects

Laura Nader

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Laura Nader, an instrumental figure in the development of the field of legal anthropology, investigates an issue of vital importance for our time: the role of the law in the struggle for social and economic justice. In this book she gives an overview of the history of legal anthropology and at the same time urges anthropologists, lawyers, and activists to recognize the centrality of law in social change. Nader traces the evolution of the plaintiff's role in the United States in the second half of the twentieth century and passionately argues that the atrophy of the plaintiff's power during this period represents a profound challenge to justice and democracy.

Taking into account the vast changes wrought in both anthropology and the law by globalization, Nader speaks to the increasing dominance of large business corporations and the prominence of neoliberal ideology and practice today. In her discussion of these trends, she considers the rise of the alternative dispute resolution movement, which since the 1960s has been part of a major overhaul of the U.S. judicial system. Nader links the increasing popularity of this movement with the erosion of the plaintiff's power and suggests that mediation as an approach to conflict resolution is structured to favor powerful--often corporate--interests.

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