

I was going to write this ADL about my recent stint doing jury duty. I had it all set. You know, all the pithy jokes about my fellow jurors - fine, babbling, third world people all of them; the drone-like, Russian inefficiency of the jury selection process, and the couple of protest beers I had during our lunch break. But then, on the same day, I had another more depressing brush with the American legal system. The incestuous quagmire we call Hoboken traffic court.

I'll take a month of jury duty over having to supplicate myself to a judge with a high school bully's personality and poor LSAT scores any day of the week. I'll admit the whole experience soured me and maybe I'm being overly negative but who would actually choose to judge traffic court? Do you think that Southern Poverty Law Center co-founder Morris Dees had to ponder, "hmm, do I devise a novel legal strategy of using civil courts to bankrupt and emasculate vicious neo-Nazis and Ku Klux Klansmen or do I do some real good by adjudicating parking violations in Hoboken?" It's nice to have options.

I was prepared for court. I had pictures of the intersection where my so-called violation took place. I had an argument prepared. I believed legal theory was on my side. "An unjust law is no law at all," said St. Augustine. Thus, selective enforcement of a law (say for example because a tall fellow happens to drive a car with Pennsylvania license plates in an insular New Jersey town) makes any law an unjust law. I've seen every Law & Order ever filmed. I was ready. I was F. Lee Bailey without the moral ambiguity needed to gleefully represent a jealous murderer.

Then I saw what I was up against. The prosecutor who at a previous court date told me, "legally the officer is probably right, but he shouldn't have given you a ticket for that" suddenly wasn't so helpful. The cops were so chummy with the judge that I think they play on the same softball team. "Let's go your honor, a little bingo now!" There was no way, persuasive orator that I am, that the judge would find against and embarrass one of his cop buddies. Not unless he wants to play right field for the rest of the season.

I knew I was on shaky ground even before I saw the officer who'd given me the ticket walk into the court in his shiny motorcycle boots. I had to huddle with him and beg his forgiveness in the hopes of getting my ticket dropped. He was a real cheerful chap. Someday he may go to some jerkwater law school and become the next sourpuss to preside over traffic court.

Traffic court is all about the deal. Here's some advice. Never ever just pay the ticket. They always offer you something better if you make the meager effort to go to court. The first day I went to court, the prosecutor offered me a lesser violation with no points on my license and \$130.00 in fines and court costs. On my second and last trip, he reached into his back pocket and suggested no points and a total of \$65. That's the deal I took but I left wondering what I might have gotten if I'd gone back a third time. "No dessert or Nintendo for a week. I can live with that your honor."

Somehow after seeing the example of justice at the Hoboken traffic court, my decision to do jury duty seemed noble and a little bit naive. I stopped beating myself up over not being successful enough to get out of it anymore. I do have one suggestion for the woman who announced which jurors were needed where at the Jersey City courthouse. If you have to read Spanish,

Vietnamese, and Arab sounding names four days a week every week, you could at least make a little effort to learn how they're pronounced. The g in Nguyen is silent and the two ll's in Guillermo sound like a y. It doesn't take that much effort to be fair to people. Hey there's a suggestion that could work at another court I know.