
BOOK REVIEWS

JUDGE DAVE AND THE RAINBOW PEOPLE BY JUDGE DAVID SENTELLE

By C. BOYDEN GRAY

In writing a review of Judge David Sentelle's book, *Judge Dave and the Rainbow People*, I have significant conflicts of interest: I was a law school classmate of David's at UNC Law School, I am a native of North Carolina who spent time in the mountains not far from the locus of this book, and I practice administrative law which is greatly affected by the court where David sits. I might therefore be expected to give a good review, whatever I really thought.

Well, let me tell you, this book is a gem, and a must read for anyone interested in the law, or who wants to be greatly amused for 250 pages. It is, of course, especially amusing if you know David Sentelle.

But first, a little context.

The story is about a bunch of middle-aged hippies who want to have their annual camp-out meeting at a national park in the mountains for western North Carolina. State and federal officials believe the hippies are in violation of the applicable law controlling the size of campsites. The hippies, on the other hand, believe the law violates their rights of free speech.

These legal questions quickly land on the desk of Judge David Sentelle, a federal district judge recently nominated by President Reagan to the DC Circuit. What law applies, federal or state? does a federal judge have jurisdiction? is it the North Carolina law, which strictly construed may not permit the gathering, subject to being ruled unconstitutional by a federal judge, especially considering that he is a conservative nominee awaiting confirmation by the Democratic Senate to the Court of Appeals for the DC Circuit? And why cannot Judge Dave, as the hippies call him, duck this whole thing and ship it down to the local courts?

In this delightful book, Judge Dave runs through the legal issues, and then sidesteps them altogether. For me, this is the most instructive part of the book, because of the obvious tension between the need to observe the rule of law and need to maintain peace and tranquility, otherwise known as common sense.

The book is a masterpiece of storytelling about how Judge Dave found a way to resolve this tension without compromising his principles or the rule of law. But you won't get the point if you don't have a sense of humor. At the same time, it is impossible to read the book and not laugh.

When he informed a friend that he had spent a day at a "mass hippie gathering," there was a long pause and the friend replied, "I know you want to seek favor with the liberals, Sentelle, but this is ridiculous." Of course, David would have been confirmed anyway. But the book speaks for itself as to the nature of the experience and how much despite himself, David enjoyed it. And any reader will enjoy it too, for the book is edifying and highly amusing. The only problem with it is that it eventually comes to an end.