



American Indian Sovereignty and the U.S. Supreme Court: The Masking of Justice

David E. Wilkins

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"Like the miner's canary, the Indian marks the shift from fresh air to poison gas in our political atmosphere; and our treatment of Indians, even more than our treatment of other minorities, reflects the rise and fall in our democratic faith," wrote Felix S. Cohen, an early expert in Indian legal affairs.

In this book, David Wilkins charts the "fall in our democratic faith" through fifteen landmark cases in which the Supreme Court significantly curtailed Indian rights. He offers compelling evidence that Supreme Court justices selectively used precedents and facts, both historical and contemporary, to arrive at decisions that have undermined tribal sovereignty, legitimated massive tribal land losses, sanctioned the diminishment of Indian religious rights, and curtailed other rights as well.

These case studies—and their implications for all minority groups—make important and troubling reading at a time when the Supreme Court is at the vortex of political and moral developments that are redefining the nature of American government, transforming the relationship between the legal and political branches, and altering the very meaning of federalism.

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