

RENNARD STRICKLAND: A LEGACY OF GENEROSITY

*Darla W. Jackson**

The Strickland Collection of Native Peoples Law and the Strickland Collection of Law and Popular Culture at the Donald E. Pray Law Library at the University of Oklahoma College of Law are the result of the generous support of Rennard Strickland. The Native Peoples Law Collections bring together rich resources for scholars and researchers of Federal Indian law, tribal law, and the history and culture of Native Americans and other indigenous peoples. The Native Peoples Law Collection also includes literature such as works by Native American authors, art, and spiritual works. The Strickland Collection of Law and Popular Culture consisting of lobby cards and movie posters focusing on works from silent films through films of the 1980s. The lobby cards and posters evidence how persons, including lawyers and law enforcement, and law and justice themes were portrayed in popular culture. The Law and Popular Culture Collection does not have a Native Peoples focus.

Rennard Strickland concluded his career as a Senior Scholar in Residence at the University of Oklahoma College of Law, but his incredible "history of achievement as a law professor, law school dean, prolific author, art collector, legal historian, and authority on Native American Law"¹ is continued and memorialized in the collections named for him and populated through his generous gifts to the Donald E. Pray Law Library. In addition to his contributions to the two collections named for him, Professor Strickland, known for his interest in improving legal education, also contributed resources to the general collection of the Law Library. His contributions to the general collection include resources, such as the

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1. *Faculty and Staff Directory: Rennard Strickland*, UNIV. OF OKLA. COLL. OF L., <https://web.archive.org/web/20200520084756/https://www.law.ou.edu/directory/rennard-strickland> (last visited Oct. 2, 2022)..

MacCrate Report,² that study and address the necessity for change in legal academia.

Professor Strickland is noted as recognizing that he did not enjoy law school. Rather than becoming disgruntled by his experience, upon the advice of a respected professor, he became a law professor and later a law school dean to help make a difference in legal education and the legal profession.³ According to Strickland, “it wasn’t the subject that [he] disliked,”⁴ it was the manner in which the instruction was approached. Instruction was “designed to humiliate or, if not humiliate, at least expose the weaknesses [of students] in a very public manner.”⁵ Further, instruction was intended to be all consuming. Illustrative of this concept of a total focus on law school is a 1937 letter from University of Texas Law Dean Ira Hildebrand to the main library in response to popular reading titles sent to the law school. Dean Hildebrand noted:

For 30 years I have tried to impress on our students that their law work should consume every moment of the time they are in Law School. For this reason I do not want any attractive books to lead them astray ‘from the beaten path.’ For this reason I think attractive reading books should not be placed in the Law Library.⁶

Professor Strickland, I am confident, would have disagreed with Dean Hildebrand. In fact, Strickland’s desire to make legal education a more enjoyable experience that allowed for a balanced and culturally sensitive

2. SECTION OF LEGAL EDUC. & ADMISSIONS TO THE BAR, AM. BAR ASS’N, LEGAL EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT—AN EDUCATIONAL CONTINUUM: REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON LAW SCHOOLS AND THE PROFESSION: NARROWING THE GAP (1992), <https://www.corteidh.or.cr/tablas/28961.pdf>.

3. *Remembering Dean Strickland*, UNIV. OF OR. SCH. OF L., <https://web.archive.org/web/20210302020642/https://law.uoregon.edu/memoriarnennard-strickland> (last visited Oct. 2, 2022) (citing Jen Woods, *The Life and Career of Rennard Strickland: Philip H. Knight Professor of Law and Former Dean of the University of Oregon School of Law*, LAW CROSSING (Nov. 20, 2006), <https://www.lawcrossing.com/article/2148/Rennard-Strickland-Philip-H-Knight-Professor-of-Law-and-former-Dean-of-the-University-of-Oregon-School-of-Law/>); Connie Cronley, *Rennard Strickland: Doctor, Lawyer, Indian, Chief Art Collector and Storyteller*, SOONER MAG., Fall 2009, at 9, <https://journals.shareok.org/sooner/magazine/article/view/12069/12068>.

4. Woods, *supra* note 3.

5. *Remembering Dean Strickland*, *supra* note 3.

6. Roy Mersky, *The Law in Popular Culture Collection*, 25 LEGAL REFERENCE SERVS. Q., no. 1, 2006, at 1, 3, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1300/J113v25n01_01?needAccess=true.

approach to the study of law was part of the basis for his donation for the Strickland Collection of Law and Popular Culture. As described in the announcement regarding the collection:

Lobby cards are small movie posters . . . The cards and posters depict scenes from movies dating from the 1920's to the 1980's and reflect the portrayal of lawyers and law-related themes in popular culture. They were created and distributed by the National Screen Service (which ceased in 1985) in order to promote public showings of movies. There are over 200 posters and over 1,000 lobby cards in the Strickland Collection. They offer students and scholars an opportunity to view legal history in an enjoyable format while prompting and encouraging reflection on more serious issues.⁷

In addition to portraying lawyers, the Strickland Collection of Law and Popular Culture as well as the Strickland Collection of Native Peoples Law portray minority populations. The collections attempt to incorporate social and cultural issues with law-related issues. In the foreword to *Tonto's Revenge*, which is one of the many Strickland-authored books and works included in the Native Peoples Law Collection, Charles Wilkinson notes that Strickland, a Native American of Osage and Cherokee descent, "compellingly explains how the Indian way—more holistic and humanistic—is different from Anglo thinking. He shows in passionate terms why the next generation should anchor all decisions in it, not just because it is the way of Indian people, but also because it is a better way."⁸ The value of Native American culture as applied to law is in that "traditional Indian law ways fulfill[] the highest ideals of justice."⁹ Strickland suggested that "we look to the American Indian as a grandfather figure—the storyteller, the teacher. Using the Indian as teacher would help us through the uncertainty of change."¹⁰

The Strickland Collection of Native Peoples Law and the Strickland Collection of Law and Popular Culture aids in fulfilling the Law Library's primary mission. The collections "support the scholarly and instructional

7. Marilyn Nicely, *Strickland Collection of Law and Popular Culture*, UNIV. OF OKLA. COLL. OF L. (Dec. 20, 2011), <https://web.archive.org/web/20210822105407/https://law.ou.edu/news-and-media/strickland-collection-law-and-popular-culture>.

8. Charles F. Wilkinson, *Foreword to RENNARD STRICKLAND, TONTO'S REVENGE: REFLECTIONS ON AMERICAN INDIAN CULTURE AND POLICY* ix, x–xi (1997).

9. *Id.* at x.

10. Cronley, *supra* note 3, at 13.

activities of the Law Center's faculty and students and . . . serve the research and informational needs of the University, the legal community, and the public."¹¹ The Strickland Collection of Law and Popular Culture also indirectly supports the Law Library's mission by providing a format for engagement while still encouraging consideration of legal issues, and it encourages student use of the library. With some of the posters from the Strickland Collection of Law and Popular Culture prominently displayed in the Law Library, Professor Strickland's contributions continue his legacy and help broaden the image that students, the legal community, and public visitors have of the Law Library. The Strickland Collections encourage the use of the Law Library's resources and draw lawyers and other students into the Law Library. The University of Oklahoma College of Law and the Law Library staff appreciate how Professor Strickland's generosity has resulted in an expanded ability to meet our mission, to engage with a more diverse group of users by offering a welcoming and inviting Law Library environment, and to encourage improvement in legal education and the legal profession.

11. *Donald E. Pray Law Library*, UNIV. OF OKLA. COLL. OF L., <https://web.archive.org/web/20220108001417/https://law.ou.edu/law-library/donald-e-pray-law-library> (last visited Oct. 2, 2022).