

PROFESSOR STRICKLAND

*Joseph Harroz, Jr.**

Rennard Strickland is a towering figure among many who stand tall in the long history of the University of Oklahoma. His life's work as an attorney, historian, law professor, and scholar of Native American Law was formative to our law program and to the advancement of Native rights and the study of Indigenous peoples law.

He worked to achieve paradigm-shifting federal civil rights protections for Native tribes in the United States by serving as an expert witness in court cases and as editor-in-chief for foundational texts on the topic of Indian Law.

His legal scholarship has found its place in law schools throughout the nation. Notably, he founded and was the faculty director for the Center for the Study of American Indian Law and Policy at the OU College of Law. Highly renowned as a giant in this field, his expertise and leadership were pivotal in developing this educational center, which is now a philosophical and literal forum for policymakers, legal scholars, tribal, state, and federal leaders to discuss and debate topics of Indian Law.

I personally felt a deep sense of gratitude that he chose to join OU College of Law as Senior Scholar in Residence. His dedication helped forge our legal institution into one of the most forward-thinking and rich environments in which to train future lawyers.

His academic interests were complex, ranging from legal studies and history to art collecting and writing. His contributions to our university were just as broad, illustrating to our students that a wide lens, a sense of individualism, and strength of your convictions can truly change our world for the better.

It's for his humanity and depth of character—he was unapologetic and undeterred in his push for equal rights for marginalized groups—that we remember and honor him as much as we do for his scholarship and legal accomplishments.

Long before his association with the University of Oklahoma, Rennard was influential in progressing Indian and Tribal rights, becoming an authority on the topic. Born in Muskogee, Oklahoma, and being of Osage and Cherokee heritage, Rennard was steeped in the issues that affected Native tribes.

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And it molded his life's work.

Speaking before the U.S. Supreme Court in several landmark cases, he was a powerful force in advancing Native rights and Indian Law in the twentieth century.

It's not at all surprising that he reached the height of legal scholarship when he earned a Doctor of Juridical Science in 1975 from the University of Virginia School of Law. His fiercely independent spirit and intellectual curiosity were destined to make a statement upon the practice.

As dean of four law schools, a visiting professor at Harvard Law School among others, an author on various legal topics, and holding leadership appointments to more than one legal society of renown, Rennard engaged his entire being toward his intellectual and moral pursuits.

He curated a unique collection of pop culture memorabilia related to the history of the law, which makes up the Strickland Collection of Law and Popular Culture, housed in the OU College of Law's Donald E. Pray Law Library. He donated over 1,000 pieces of movie cards and posters dating from the 1920s through the 1980s that reflect law-related themes and characters who would come to represent the profession in mainstream culture.

Rennard had an ability to see the big picture; to understand how all the cultural pieces fit together to shape the way we think about each other and ourselves within our communities.

For him, art was a language that could tell the stories that hadn't been recorded in any official record or court documents.

He made a generous donation of Native art to OU's Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art in 2009: "Spirit Red: Visions of Native American Artists from the Rennard Strickland Collection."

This was a mixed-medium, curated collection by Rennard valued at the time at approximately \$1 million. It reflects his personal taste in paintings, pottery, beadwork, basketry, textiles, and other art forms. It includes Native artists not just from the Southwest, but from the entire North American continent.

The breadth of his artistic interests is a mirror of what he accomplished in his life: he was an advocate for Native tribes in various roles where he fought for their interests in Oklahoma's highest court that resulted in much of their financial and legal autonomy they retain today; a law professor who tore down notions of elitism; an expert and author; and a patron of literary and visual arts.

What he left behind here at OU is a gift that will live on for generations—not just on our campus, but for people and communities across our nation and world.

He holds a special place in our hearts in Oklahoma and at OU. His bold spirit is our legacy that continues to enliven our audacious ambition to bring compassion and humanity into our institutions, our communities, and ourselves.