Growing up in Muskogee, Oklahoma—the "Capitol of the Five Civilized Tribes"—I have always been fascinated by Indian culture. My mother, Rachael Wiley Price, was born in Tamaha, Indian Territory, before Oklahoma was a state. My grandfather, James Marshall Wiley, with whom I lived as a child, was a Baptist minister who was active in local politics and Indian affairs. He served as solicitor for Bacone College, a school for Indians in Muskogee. He was instrumental in preventing the closing of the Nuyaka Mission Indian School in Okmulgee in the 1920s and he fought for special admissions criteria for Indian students at Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee. "Dandy," as I called him, spoke both the Choctaw and Creek languages, however, he would not teach them to me. He told me that I didn’t "need" to learn them. Mother said that we were part Cherokee, but I have never been able to find any records to support her claim. All I know is that Indians were respected and admired by my family and that we practiced many Indian customs.

It is only natural then, that when my interest in the international legal rights of the child coincided with my interest in Indian culture, I should try to put them both together. On a visit to see my mother in 1991, I learned of the Sovereignty Symposium, an annual conference on Indian law sponsored by the Oklahoma State Supreme Court. At the suggestion of Supreme Court Justice Hardy Summers, I contacted the coordinator of the Symposium, Justice Yvonne Kauger, to see if I could be a participant. My first presentation had to do with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its possible future application in tribal venues.

After studying the Sovereignty Symposium program, I realized that while it was comprehensive, it did not have an international component. Justice Kauger agreed to let me organize a panel on international indigenous issues for the following year. It was sufficiently successful for me to be able to persuade Justice Kauger that in 1993, in honor of the International Year for the World's Indigenous People, I should have more than one panel. Happily, I was given an entire day—four panels—to fill with international presentations under the title, "International Law and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples." By 1994, the international section of the Sovereignty Symposium had become an annual event. Participants came from many countries, at their own expense, to present papers and to experience Indian culture "Oklahoma style." This meant that they were able to interact with Indians who did not live on reservations and whose tribal affiliations had independent legal systems that were respected by the Oklahoma Supreme Court.
Unfortunately, the excellent papers presented on these panels were published only as Sovereignty Symposium documents, and usually did not reach the general public. One year, at a preliminary dinner for my panelists, one of them said, "Why don’t you publish these papers in a book?" I immediately got up from the table and called Heike Fenton of Transnational Publishers to see if she would be interested. Her answer was affirmative.

When I returned to New York, we signed a contract and assumed that the book would be ready in less than a year. After all, I had more than enough authors. Nothing could have been further from reality. While most of the authors agreed to write and submitted their chapters on time, others took many months to produce their promised contributions. By the time that all of the chapters were ready, some of the earlier ones were out of date and required revisions—all of which added months to the publication process. Assuring that footnote style was uniform presented a particular challenge, since only five of the fifteen authors were familiar with American legal footnoting style. Fortunately, for this task I had the assistance of Susan Kilbourne, a colleague who had footnoting experience from working on the Georgetown University Journal on Fighting Poverty. Susan carefully studied the footnotes, made stylistic corrections and noted incomplete citations. Of course, this meant that some authors then had not only to update their manuscripts, but they also had to track down the missing information, some of which had been misplaced. To their credit, none of the authors complained. Thanks to the wonders of E-mail, everyone responded to these requests in record time.

Putting the final touches on this manuscript has reminded me of the many people involved in the publication process to whom I owe a debt of gratitude. First, I want to express my very great appreciation to Chief Justice Yvonne Kauger, who gave me total freedom to organize the international panels at the Sovereignty Symposium, which gave me the opportunity to become more fully acquainted with the growing field of indigenous rights. I would also like to thank my wonderful cooperative authors, who helped to make this important project a reality—as well as Susan Kilbourne, whose footnote diligence helped to speed up the editing process. A special thanks goes to Professor Keith Nunes (Orlando School of Law) and Professor Siegfried Wiessner (St. Thomas University School of Law) for encouraging me to undertake this project. Finally, I am especially grateful to Heike Fenton of Transnational Publishers, who never abandoned the book, even though she may have had serious doubts about whether the project would ever be completed.

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