



Nine Scorpions in a Bottle: Great Judges and Cases of the Supreme Court

Max Lerner

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An eye-opening look by a renowned expert at one of the most important institutions in American democracy.

To many Americans, the United States Supreme Court continues to loom large as an unimpeachable symbol of the rule of law and the triumph of justice. But behind that towering façade there has been so much infighting, intrigue, and backstabbing that Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. reportedly once described the court as “nine scorpions in a bottle.”

Nobody appreciated this more than Max Lerner, the acknowledged dean of Supreme Court observers. From the seminal articles he wrote for the *Yale Law Journal* in the 1930s to the *New York Post* columns that ran almost until his death in 1992, Lerner demystified the court and strove to uncover the historical, social, and psychological underpinnings of its landmark decisions. He believed in the majesty and the mystique it holds, but was clear-eyed about its human dimensions and moments of shame. Here are Lerner’s celebrated portraits of John Marshall, Louis Brandeis, Felix Frankfurter, Hugo Black, Earl Warren, and of course Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., whose judicial vision Lerner most respected. Here, too, are his timeless discussions of the cases that continue to shape American society, such as *Brown v. Board of Education*, *US v. Nixon*, and *Roe v. Wade*. With a new preface for this edition, *Nine Scorpions in a Bottle* follows Max Lerner’s lifetime examination of the American way of law case by case, justice by justice, and will enrich every reader’s understanding of the Supreme

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