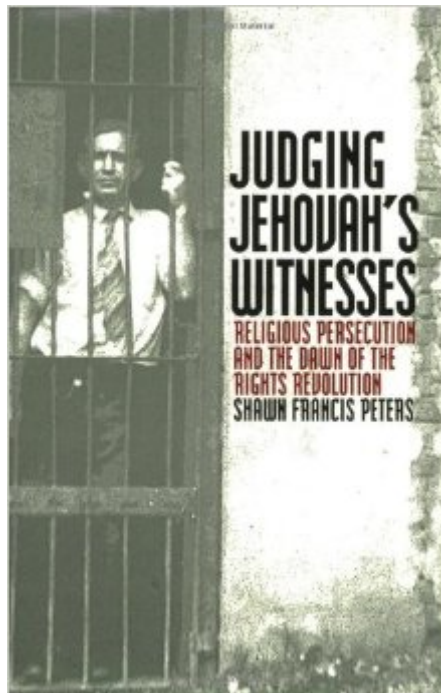


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Judging Jehovah's Witnesses: Religious Persecution And The Dawn Of The Rights Revolution



Synopsis

While millions of Americans were defending liberty against the Nazis, liberty was under vicious attack at home. One of the worst outbreaks of religious persecution in U.S. history occurred during World War II when Jehovah's Witnesses were intimidated, beaten, and even imprisoned for refusing to salute the flag or serve in the armed forces. Determined to claim their First Amendment rights, Jehovah's Witnesses waged a tenacious legal campaign that led to twenty-three Supreme Court rulings between 1938 and 1946. Now Shawn Peters has written the first complete account of the personalities, events, and institutions behind those cases, showing that they were more than vindication for unpopular beliefs—they were also a turning point in the nation's constitutional commitment to individual rights. Peters begins with the story of William Gobitas, a Jehovah's Witness whose children refused to salute the flag at school. He follows this famous case to the Supreme Court, where he captures the intellectual sparring between Justices Frankfurter and Stone over individual liberties; then he describes the aftermath of the Court's ruling against Gobitas, when angry mobs savagely assaulted Jehovah's Witnesses in hundreds of communities across America. *Judging Jehovah's Witnesses* tells how persecution much of it directed by members of patriotic organizations like the American Legion touched the lives of Witnesses of all ages; why the Justice Department and state officials ignored the Witnesses' pleas for relief; and how the ACLU and liberal clergymen finally stepped forward to help them. Drawing on interviews with Witnesses and extensive research in ACLU archives, he examines the strategies that beleaguered Witnesses used to combat discrimination and goes beyond the familiar Supreme Court rulings by analyzing more obscure lower court decisions as well. By vigorously pursuing their cause, the Witnesses helped to inaugurate an era in which individual and minority rights emerged as matters of concern for the Supreme Court and foreshadowed events in the civil rights movement. Like the classics *Gideon's Trumpet* and *Simple Justice*, *Judging Jehovah's Witnesses* vividly narrates a moving human drama while reminding us of the true meaning of our Constitution and the rights it protects.

Book Information

Paperback: 352 pages

Publisher: Univ Pr of Kansas; Reprint edition (April 11, 2000)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0700611827

ISBN-13: 978-0700611829

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.7 x 8.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars See all reviews (31 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #650,736 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #28 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Denominations & Sects > Jehovah's Witness #495 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Religious Studies > Ethics #1447 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Specific Topics > Civil Rights & Liberties

Customer Reviews

This book is about the legal battle Jehovah's Witnesses waged, in the 1930's and 1940's, to secure their constitutional rights to practice their beliefs in the midst of the hysteria that consumed the USA in the years leading up to and into the Second World War. The author, Shawn Francis Peters, is not one of Jehovah's Witnesses nor is he sympathetic to their beliefs. However, he does believe in their right to think, proclaim, and act in harmony with their beliefs. If you are interested in American, legal, or religious history this book will be of interest to you. What I particularly enjoyed was the background material he gives. The Witnesses, their persecutors, the police and judges. He helps us to see what motivated each group. He takes us behind the scenes of the Supreme Court. There we see that there were not just dry legal deliberations that went on but the beliefs of the Justices caused them to become emotionally involved as well. The book is full of many firsthand accounts. So we get a sense of what it felt like to be living during that time. We feel the anguish of the Witnesses, as they endure their trials, facing discrimination and prejudice from what may be called 'petty officials'. We see policeman, sheriff, mayor, governor, and the U.S. Justice Dept basically ignore their pleas for help against their persecutors. They finally realized that "their only recourse was the Courts". We, also, see that there were others who could see that if the actions against Jehovah's Witnesses were allowed to stand then the rights of all minorities would be at stake.

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