The success of television series and movies about trial lawyers, their clients, and their travails (including my favorite, *Rumpole of the Bailey*), illustrates the attraction most of us have for courtroom drama. But fictional accounts often pale in comparison to the excitement involved, year in and year out, in real-life courtroom trials.

From the time of my entry into law school more than half a century ago, I have been fascinated by the legal controversies, both civil and criminal, that have formed the basis of so much of the colorful history of the Western world. The circumstances that precipitated these cases, and the unusual personalities so often involved, offer insightful views not only of compelling personal stories but of the important events that have shaped the United States. A great number of these events have evolved from litigation and court rulings that remain powerful in our society to this day. One shining example recounted in this book is the momentous opinion written in 1803 by Chief Justice John Marshall, which announced the bedrock principle that the Supreme Court has power to declare invalid statutes enacted by Congress and approved by the president that the Court deems inconsistent with the Constitution.

Marilyn and Bob Aitken’s *Law Makers, Law Breakers and Uncommon Trials* contains a treasure trove of material about a number of intriguing cases and their resolutions. Their effortless, easy-to-read style is accessible to all and avoids legalistic parlance. They have unearthed many little-known facts and events that led parties into court. The diversity of material they have explored contributes to a deeper understanding of past lives and times, which, in turn, have helped shaped our own.

The legal lore contained here is not limited solely to that of the United States. Historic cases are examined from England and
Ireland, including an example of masterful cross-examination by Sir Edward Carson, whose questioning brought high-flying Irish poet and playwright Oscar Wilde down to earth and eventually landed him in Reading Gaol. There are also accounts of a number of cases resulting from World War II atrocities in France and Italy. Additionally, the authors examine the defamation suit brought against novelist Leon Uris for his description in *Exodus* of the horrific conduct of an Auschwitz doctor. Let me offer a few other examples of what is in store:

1. The events leading to the infamous 1856 ruling of the Supreme Court in the *Dred Scott* case, which dehumanized African-Americans and helped foster the Civil War, and the saga of Rosa Parks, whose lonely act of courage presaged the movement for civil rights in the 1960s.

2. Several extraordinary trials in the early days when the West was being settled, including the trial of the man who killed Wild Bill Hickok, as well as the trials arising from the 1857 massacre of the Fancher party in the Utah Territory.

3. Courtroom battles involving works of art and literature that were looked upon with disdain when they first appeared but now are regarded as among the finest achievements. These accounts include the trial resulting from customs officials’ confiscation of *Ulysses* on the basis that James Joyce’s masterpiece was an obscene book, as well as the suit that artist James Whistler brought against critic John Ruskin for having trashed his paintings as third-rate art.

I once read that a positive view of life will not solve all our problems but will annoy enough people to make it worthwhile. Accordingly, I express my optimistic hope and expectation that Marilyn and Bob Aitken will continue to plumb the archives and favor us in later volumes with more delightfully engrossing accounts of remarkable trials and the folks enmeshed in them.

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