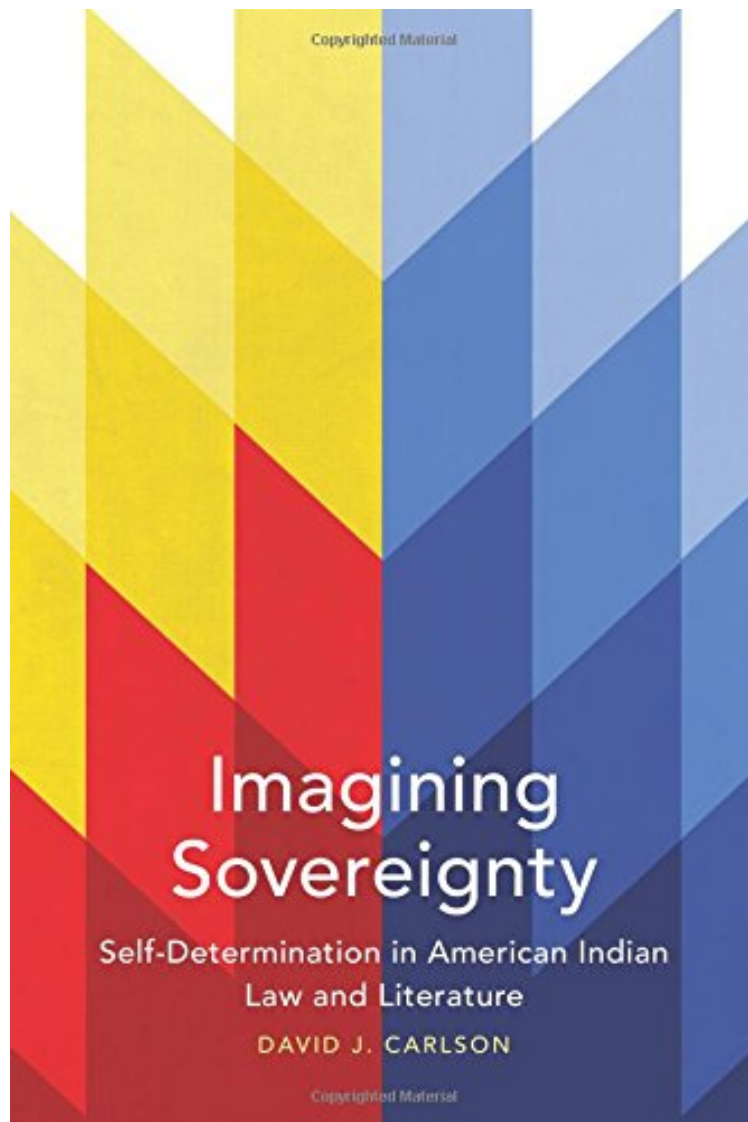


[Free] *Imagining Sovereignty: Self-Determination in American Indian Law and Literature* (American Indian Literature and Critical Studies Series)

## **Imagining Sovereignty: Self-Determination in American Indian Law and Literature (American Indian Literature and Critical Studies Series)**

*David J. Carlson*

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#2513843 in Books 2016-03-08 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.00 x .58 x 6.00l, .0 #File Name: 0806151978242 pages | File size: 67.Mb

**David J. Carlson : *Imagining Sovereignty: Self-Determination in American Indian Law and Literature* (American Indian Literature and Critical Studies Series)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Imagining Sovereignty: Self-Determination in American Indian Law and Literature* (American Indian Literature and Critical Studies Series):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Thorough and clear  
By Mammoth  
Thorough and clear discussion of sovereignty for Indigenous people.  
0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Recommended for students of Native American literature  
By Scott A.  
On the last page of his book, David Carlson writes, "Employing the hermeneutic practices of a sophisticated and fully historicized form of sovereign reading strikes me as one of the most promising ways that Native American literary studies can continue to play a central role in the field it helped to build" (198). This describes what he does in each chapter of his book: providing "sophisticated and fully historicized" readings of works by famous native authors, such as D'Arcy McNickle, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, and Gerald Vizenor, and works by lesser-known native authors that provide insight into the benefits of understanding the discourse of native sovereignty as it is articulated in very specific geographic, cultural, and historical circumstances. When the emphasis in Native American Studies shifted from issues of cultural identity to tribal sovereignty, the scholars of native literature lost their central role in shaping the field. This was due in part to the perception that literature was not practically important in defending or advancing tribal sovereignty -- that was left to the legal scholars, the historians, the political scientists, the sociologists, etc. Carlson's book seeks to demonstrate the importance of literary interpretation in understanding complicated issues related to sovereignty and in advancing tribal sovereignty in practical ways. Along the way, Carlson seeks to reconcile the cosmopolitanism/nationalism split among Native American Studies scholars, discussing ways that both camps can strengthen tribal sovereignty. I recommend this book for any graduate student in Native American literature, but it also is accessible to undergraduates. I found its chapter on the history of the concept of sovereignty very useful. And even if readers disagree with Carlson's conclusions, I believe they will respect the careful readings he provides of canonical and non-canonical texts.

Sovereignty is perhaps the most ubiquitous term in American Indian writing today but its meaning and function are anything but universally understood. This is as it should be, David J. Carlson suggests, for a concept frequently at the center of various and often competing claims to authority. In *Imagining Sovereignty*, Carlson explores sovereignty as a discursive middle ground between tribal communities and the United States as a settler-colonial power. His work reveals the complementary ways in which legal and literary texts have generated politically significant representations of the world, which in turn have produced particular effects on readers and advanced the cause of tribal self-determination. Drawing on western legal historical sources and American Indian texts, Carlson traces a dual genealogy of sovereignty. *Imagining Sovereignty* identifies the concept as a marker, one that allows both the colonizing power of the United States and the resisting powers of various American Indian nations to organize themselves and their various claims to authority. In the process, sovereignty also functions as a point of exchange where these claims compete with and complicate one another. To this end, Carlson analyzes how several contemporary American Indian writers and critics have sought to fuse literary practices and legal structures into fully formed discourses of self-determination. After charting the development of the concept of sovereignty in natural law and its permutations in federal Indian policy, Carlson maps out the nature and function of sovereignty discourses in the work of contemporary Native scholars such as Russel Barsh, Gerald Taiaiake Alfred, D'Arcy McNickle, and Vine Deloria, and in the work of more expressly literary American Indian writers such as Craig Womack, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Gerald Vizenor, and Francisco Patencio. Often read in opposition, the writings of these indigenous authors emerge in *Imagining Sovereignty* as a coherent literary and political tradition one whose varied discourse of sovereignty aptly reflects American Indian peoples diverse political contexts.

Carlson's *Imagining Sovereignty* is a taut and engaging account of that most revolutionary of concepts Native sovereignty as discerned through a close reading of works by leading political and literary writers, including Vine Deloria, Jr., Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, and Gerald Vizenor. David Wilkins, author of *Uneven Ground: American Indian Sovereignty and Federal Law*