## SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

	ΤN	THE	SUPF	REME	COL	JR'I'	OF.	THE	ONT.I.F.	D	S'I'A'I	LES
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JIMCY I	McG]	IRT,							)			
			Peti	tion	ner,				)			
		v.							) No.	18	3-95	26
OKLAHOI	MA,								)			
			Resp	onde	ent.				)			
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Pages: 1 through 91

Place: Washington, D.C.

Date: May 11, 2020

## HERITAGE REPORTING CORPORATION

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1	IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE	UNITED STATES
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3	JIMCY McGIRT,	)
4	Petitioner,	)
5	v.	) No. 18-9526
6	OKLAHOMA,	)
7	Respondent.	)
8		
9	Washington, D.O	C.
10	Monday, May 11, 2	2020
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12	The above-entitled	matter came on for
13	oral argument before the Supre	me Court of the
14	United States at 10:00 a.m.	
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1	APPEARANCES:
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3	IAN H. GERSHENGORN, Esquire, Washington, D.C.;
4	on behalf of the Petitioner.
5	RIYAZ A. KANJI, Esquire, Ann Arbor, Michigan;
6	for the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, as amicus curiae
7	supporting the Petitioner.
8	MITHUN MANSINGHANI, Solicitor General,
9	Oklahoma City, Oklahoma;
10	on behalf of the Respondent.
11	EDWIN S. KNEEDLER, Deputy Solicitor General,
12	Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.;
13	for the United States, as amicus curiae,
14	supporting the Respondent.
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1	PROCEEDINGS
2	(10:00 a.m.)
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We'll hear
4	argument first this morning in Case 18-9526,
5	McGirt versus Oklahoma.
6	Mr. Gershengorn.
7	ORAL ARGUMENT OF IAN H. GERSHENGORN
8	ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER
9	MR. GERSHENGORN: Mr. Chief Justice,
10	and may it please the Court:
11	This case is resolved by the
12	fundamental proposition that decisions about
13	sovereign rights are for Congress to make and
14	Congress makes those decisions by speaking
15	clearly in the text. The decision below must be
16	reversed because the text makes clear that
17	Congress never terminated the Creek reservation
18	and never transferred federal criminal
19	jurisdiction to Oklahoma.
20	I have four basic points to make this
21	morning. First, the Creek Nation had a
22	reservation. The relevant treaties reserved the
23	lands from sale and solemnly guaranteed the
24	lands for the Creek to govern. The text of both
25	treaties and statutes expressly identified the

1 Creek land as a reservation. Nothing more was 2 needed. Second, Congress did not establish --3 disestablish that reservation. Indeed, Congress 4 considered hallmark language of disestablishment 5 and rejected it. Congress initially sought 6 cession yet instead provided only for allotment. 7 8 Then, when congressional inaction would have 9 dissolved the tribe, Congress instead preserved 10 the tribe and its government for all purposes authorized by law, and it did so against the 11 12 backdrop of existing tribal authority to 13 legislate over reservation land. 14 congressional judgments should be respected. 15 Third, Congress did not transfer criminal jurisdiction to Oklahoma. 16 17 statehood, the Major Crimes Act established 18 exclusive federal jurisdiction over enumerated 19 crimes in "any state of the United States." 20 When Congress overrides the Major Crimes Act and 21 transfers jurisdiction to a state, it does so 22 expressly, and it did not do so here. 23 Finally, Oklahoma's rhetoric about 24 disruption does not change the result. On the 25 criminal side, this Court's decision in Ramos is

- 1 a complete answer, and on the civil side, the
- 2 main issues are tax and other regulatory issues
- 3 that are routinely resolved by tribal-state
- 4 agreements. In any event, Parker makes clear
- 5 that questions of sovereignty are distinct from
- 6 claims of reservation status.
- 7 This Court should resolve the
- 8 reservation question, leaving jurisdictional
- 9 disputes to Congress, the relevant sovereign,
- and then for this Court to resolve if and when
- 11 they arise.
- 12 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Counsel, the
- 13 --
- MR. GERSHENGORN: So let me start this
- 15 --
- 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: -- State
- 17 argues that the territory should be analyzed as
- 18 a dependent Indian community under 1151 and not
- 19 as a reservation. They base this argument on
- 20 our decisions in Sandoval and Creek Nation and
- 21 1151 itself and the fact that the Creeks have
- 22 always maintained, have been adamant about the
- 23 fact that they are not reservation Indians.
- Now you refer, of course, to the many
- 25 times in which the treaty is referred to as a

- 1 reservation, but what is your answer to the 2 State's analysis of our precedent? MR. GERSHENGORN: So, Your Honor, I 3 4 think both the precedent and the language 5 support the idea that this is not a dependent 6 Indian community. What this Court said in 7 Venetie and what Judge -- then Judge Gorsuch 8 said in Hydro Resources is that the dependent Indian community label is a catchall for tribes 9 10 that did not have a reservation and are not on restricted lands. The best evidence of what 11 12 Congress thought about whether Creek lands were 13 a reservation under the statute is that Congress 14 referred to those lands as a reservation under 15 the statute. With respect to Sandoval and the other 16 17 cases, it is crystal-clear that when Sandoval 18 and those cases are using the term "dependent 19 Indian community" that they are describing 20 tribes and other groups that are within 21 Congress's broad power to legislate for -- for 22 tribes broadly. They are not excluding the --23 the Creek. 24 Indeed, and --
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,

- 1 counsel.
- Justice Thomas?
- JUSTICE THOMAS: Yes, counsel. In
- 4 Solem and in Parker, those cases only involved
- 5 the disposition of surplus land. And, here, of
- 6 course, there's much, much more being done in a
- 7 whole series of statutes involving both
- 8 sovereignty and the allotment of land.
- 9 Can you point to any case in which
- we've applied the Solem fact framework to a case
- 11 that does as much as this -- as being -- as is
- 12 being done in this case?
- MR. GERSHENGORN: So, Your Honor, I
- 14 think the key point on -- the -- the key
- point on the Parker/Solem analysis is, as your
- 16 -- as Your Honor pointed out in that opinion,
- 17 that those are not -- that that analysis doesn't
- 18 derive from anything special about -- about how
- 19 much work Congress is doing.
- The reason the Court has always
- 21 required plain text is because treaty rights are
- 22 at issue and plain text is required to abrogate
- treaty rights and because sovereign rights are
- 24 at issue and plain text is required to abrogate
- 25 sovereign rights.

1	So there's nothing magic about Parker
2	and Solem in terms of whether they're dealing
3	with surplus lands or not. The key point in
4	Parker and Solem is that plain text is required
5	to do the kinds of transfers that are at issue
6	here.
7	And when you look at the plain text, I
8	think this is a this case is even stronger
9	than Your Honor's opinion in Parker for three
10	main reasons. First, of course, is that the
11	tribe was not absent from the land in the same
12	way that the tribe was in Parker.
13	Second, the land here was allotted in
14	almost entirely to the tribe to tribal
15	members themselves, to Indians.
16	And, third, Congress took steps in
17	1906 to preserve the tribe.
18	And I guess the thing I would point
19	to, Your Honor, when you ask about whether there
20	are cases like this, I think this is stronger
21	than case other cases because the question
22	isn't just what did Congress fail to do but how
23	much
24	JUSTICE THOMAS: I don't mean to
25	interrupt you, but I do want to get this point

- 1 in, that in -- in Parker, we were only dealing
- 2 with one allotment statute that was disposing of
- 3 surplus land. Here, we're dealing with a series
- 4 of statutes that go both to land, the allotment
- of land, and to the reduction in the authority
- of the tribe. That's what I mean.
- 7 MR. GERSHENGORN: So I understand
- 8 that, Your Honor. And I think the critical
- 9 point is that Congress actually preserved the
- 10 tribe when it had the chance when inaction would
- 11 have dissolved the tribe. And so, actually, I
- 12 think that makes this stronger than in other
- 13 cases because Congress took --
- 14 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you.
- 15 Thank you, counsel.
- 16 MR. GERSHENGORN: -- deliberate action
- 17 when this action dissolved --
- 18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you.
- 19 Justice Ginsburg?
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: Counsel, you don't
- 21 claim immunity from prosecution for a major
- 22 crime. I think your position is that the
- 23 federal prosecutor could have charged your
- 24 client?
- MR. GERSHENGORN: That's absolutely

- 1 correct, Your Honor.
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: Federal penalties,
- 3 as I understand it, are at least as harsh as the
- 4 state and in both forms, state and federal, you
- 5 would have due process protections.
- 6 So how are you harmed by the fact that
- 7 you were tried in the state court rather than
- 8 the federal court when you were exposed to the
- 9 same -- at least the same penalties in both?
- MR. GERSHENGORN: So, Your Honor, I
- 11 think the harm flows anytime that a defendant, a
- 12 criminal defendant is tried by a sovereign that
- 13 lacks jurisdiction. I don't think that we have
- 14 ever -- that this Court has ever said that
- 15 there's a kind of harmless error analysis when a
- 16 -- when a sovereign asserts jurisdiction,
- 17 particularly criminal jurisdiction, over a
- defendant and that you would look to see, well,
- 19 are the penalties the same.
- 20 Of course, it is a different set of --
- 21 I mean, it's a different juror pool, it's a
- 22 different -- it is a different set of potential
- penalties, and so I guess I don't think that the
- 24 fact that -- that there would be a rigorous
- 25 trial in federal court suggests that you would

- 1 overlook the absence of jurisdiction.
- 2 Indeed, it seems to me to make this
- 3 case even easier in some ways because we are not
- 4 claiming an immunity, as Your Honor pointed out,
- 5 and, indeed, there would be a retrial in federal
- 6 court if the Court were to --
- 7 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Counsel --
- 8 MR. GERSHENGORN: -- to reverse.
- 9 JUSTICE GINSBURG: -- what makes this
- 10 case hard is that there have been hundreds,
- 11 hundreds of prosecutions, some very heinous
- offenses of the state law. On your view, they
- 13 would all become undone.
- 14 And if you compare that to the
- 15 situation in our recent Ramos case where there
- 16 were the -- there's a question about redoing
- 17 already tried cases, here, the Ramos
- 18 retroactivity pales in comparison to what is
- involved here, hundreds of prosecutions, for
- 20 murder, for terrible sexual offenses.
- These would all have to be done years
- later when the witnesses may not be there
- 23 anymore. It's hundreds of cases that --
- MR. GERSHENGORN: So, Your Honor,
- 25 there are hundreds of case -- there may be

- 1 hundreds of cases. Actually, in -- in truth, we
- don't know how many cases. The State, which has
- 3 the numbers, hasn't suggested that there are
- 4 anything -- been able to document there are
- 5 anything like hundreds of cases, but there are
- 6 fewer than in Ramos.
- 7 And in any event, what this Court said
- 8 in Ramos was that that provides no reason to
- 9 disregard the plain text. To be sure, that
- 10 there would be --
- 11 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 12 counsel. Thank you, counsel.
- Justice Breyer?
- JUSTICE BREYER: Good morning,
- 15 counsel. A minor point, but one of the -- one
- of the arguments, I think, is that whether
- they're a reservation or not, Congress wanted
- 18 state courts to try the major state crimes.
- 19 And in reference to that, I think the
- 20 government cites Felix Cohen, who was a great
- 21 expert in this area. And I looked at his
- 22 letter. He does seem to say that.
- So, if you have any comments about
- that, about his argument or about that
- 25 particular aspect of it, I'd like to hear them.

1 MR. GERSHENGORN: So, Your Honor, I 2 think that the -- the -- the law is clear that Congress did not intend for crimes -- for tribal 3 crimes to be tried. And I think this is one of 4 5 the most straightforward statutory construction cases this Court will see. 6 The Major Crimes Act at statehood 7 8 provided that it applied to any state of the 9 United States. There is no exception for 10 Oklahoma, and there was none before, at, or 11 after statehood. 12 Second, what they have pointed to, what the other side has pointed to, is what 13 14 happened before statehood, and what happened 15 before statehood was that crimes were being prosecuted in the name of the United States in 16 17 courts set up by Congress, applying federal law, 18 which the -- which had adopted Arkansas law as 19 the rule of decision. 20 It is the exact opposite of conferring 21 jurisdiction on the states to try. 22 Third, there was nothing in the 23 Enabling Act that would have changed that. 24 Indeed, the Enabling Act sent to federal courts 25 all cases which, had they been committed in a

- 1 state, would have been subject to federal
- 2 prosecution. That describes the Major Crimes
- 3 Act perfectly.
- 4 And finally, Your Honor, when Congress
- 5 transfers jurisdiction to a state, it does so
- 6 expressly. In Nagonset, which this Court
- 7 described as the first major transfer of
- 8 jurisdiction, the language used was jurisdiction
- 9 is conferred. In Public Law 280, the states
- 10 shall have jurisdiction.
- 11 In New York, New York shall have
- 12 jurisdiction. And even in -- with respect to
- Oklahoma, in 1908, when they transferred -- when
- 14 Congress transferred probate jurisdiction, it
- 15 said the -- that the Oklahoma courts shall have
- 16 jurisdiction.
- 17 And so tribal --
- 18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 19 counsel.
- 20 Justice Alito?
- 21 JUSTICE ALITO: You referred to the
- Oklahoma Enabling Act, but the language in that
- is that a case would be -- a case that was
- 24 pending in the territorial court at the time of
- 25 statehood would be sent to one of the new

- 1 federal district courts or to one of the new
- 2 state courts depending on where it would have
- 3 been prosecuted if it had been prosecuted in a
- 4 state.
- 5 It doesn't say in a state in Indian
- 6 Country. It says in a state. So isn't the
- 7 clear meaning of that that cases in Oklahoma
- 8 would be treated like cases anyplace else?
- 9 MR. GERSHENGORN: So, Your Honor, I
- 10 don't -- they -- treated like anyplace else,
- 11 meaning it was subject to the Major Crimes Act.
- 12 So I do -- I agree with you that there is no
- Oklahoma exceptionalism, but I think that cuts
- 14 exactly in our favor.
- What Oklahoma is saying is that,
- 16 uniquely among all the states in the union, it's
- 17 exempt from the Major Crimes Act. I think the
- 18 Enabling Act, the language Your Honor is citing,
- 19 does exactly the opposite.
- JUSTICE ALITO: How about --
- 21 MR. GERSHENGORN: The language says --
- 22 JUSTICE ALITO: -- what it said in the
- 23 1897 statute, which said that "the laws of the
- 24 United States enforced in the territory shall
- apply to all persons therein, irrespective of

- 1 race."
- 2 And yet you're saying that cases at
- 3 the time of statehood would be treated based on
- 4 race. How can that be consistent with the 1897
- 5 Act?
- 6 MR. GERSHENGORN: Because I think the
- 7 1897 Act, Your Honor, extends if -- what the
- 8 U.S. -- the 1897 Act does is extend both U.S.
- 9 law and -- and the Arkansas law, regardless of
- 10 race.
- But it did not eliminate any language
- 12 that was in the Major Crimes Act already. That
- was a portion of U.S. law. But, regardless,
- 14 Your Honor, of what happened pre-statehood -- I
- 15 mean, we can debate that, but regardless of what
- 16 happened pre-statehood, there's no disagreement
- 17 that the Major Crimes Act applies of its own
- 18 term at statehood.
- 19 Statehood itself was a major event
- 20 that transferred -- that -- that, obviously,
- 21 transferred Oklahoma from a territory to a
- 22 state. And at that point --
- JUSTICE ALITO: What happened after --
- 24 what happened after statehood? Can you cite a
- 25 single case under the Major Crimes Act that was

- 1 transferred to or thereafter prosecuted in
- 2 federal court?
- 3 MR. GERSHENGORN: No, Your Honor. But
- 4 this Court has made clear that events on the
- 5 ground don't override the text. What --
- 6 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 7 counsel.
- Justice Sotomayor?
- 9 MR. GERSHENGORN: -- what we never
- 10 interpret criminal statutes to be --
- 11 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I'm sorry.
- 12 MR. GERSHENGORN: -- what the
- 13 executive --
- 14 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Counsel, thank
- 15 you.
- 16 Justice Sotomayor?
- 17 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Counsel, Justice
- 18 Ginsburg pointed out that some of the penalties
- in federal court would be higher than those
- 20 imposed in state court.
- 21 Am I -- do you disagree that some
- 22 defendants who might be entitled to raise -- if
- you were to win, some defendants who would be
- 24 entitled to challenge their convictions would
- 25 choose not to because the risk would be too high

- 1 for them?
- 2 MR. GERSHENGORN: I think that's
- 3 exactly right, Your Honor. I think that there
- 4 are -- that federal penalties will often be
- 5 higher. I think a number of defendants will
- 6 have already served large chunks of their -- of
- 7 their -- of their sentence. And their ability
- 8 to seek relief in federal court at least will be
- 9 limited by AEDPA. So I think there are reasons
- 10 to doubt the extent of the State's disruption
- 11 argument here.
- 12 And, again, remember the numbers are
- 13 all in the State's control. And so, while we've
- been hearing, you know, both in the Murphy
- 15 argument and here about, you know, murderers and
- 16 rapists getting through, in fact, there is no
- 17 evidence that the State has put forward that
- they will be in large numbers and the kinds of
- 19 habeas petitions that one would expect to see,
- 20 the kind of tsunami that -- that has been
- 21 predicted just hasn't materialized.
- 22 So I -- I agree with Your Honor's
- 23 question there.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Number two,
- there's so much discussion about the dependent

- 1 Indian community. Am I to take it that your
- 2 argument is that that's almost irrelevant?
- 3 MR. GERSHENGORN: It is almost
- 4 irrelevant. It's both wrong and irrelevant, but
- 5 I'll hit the irrelevant point first.
- 6 Regardless of what you call it, as my
- 7 colloquy with Justice Thomas tried to get at,
- 8 the -- the -- the reason we have a plain text
- 9 requirement has less to do with whether you call
- it a reservation or a dependent Indian community
- and everything to do with the fact that these
- boundaries were set up by Congress, and so, if
- 13 you are going to undo that, Congress needs to
- 14 speak and Congress needs to speak clearly.
- We're talking about transfers of
- sovereign rights, and that has to be done
- 17 clearly in the text. And you can call it a
- 18 reservation or a dependent Indian community.
- 19 The test would be the same.
- 20 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 21 counsel.
- Justice Kagan?
- JUSTICE KAGAN: So, if I could pick up
- on that, Mr. Gershengorn, you said irrelevant
- and wrong. And the Chief Justice asked you

- 1 about our two cases, Sandoval and Creek Nation,
- and I wasn't quite sure I understood your answer
- 3 to him about how those cases were using the term
- 4 and whether that is consistent or inconsistent
- 5 with your argument.
- 6 MR. GERSHENGORN: So those -- it is
- 7 consistent with our argument. As I -- as I read
- 8 both Sandoval and Creek Nation, it is using the
- 9 term "dependent Indian community" to -- to
- 10 describe the tribes -- the -- basically, tribes
- 11 broadly, that those are -- are communities over
- which Congress has the power to legislate under
- its -- under its Indian-related powers.
- In other words, it was not using it in
- 15 sort of the more narrow and technical sense that
- 16 Congress did when it enacted the 1948 statute.
- 17 So, in other words --
- 18 JUSTICE KAGAN: In other words, it's
- 19 -- it's supposed to be an umbrella term that in
- 20 --
- 21 MR. GERSHENGORN: That's exactly
- 22 right, Your Honor.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: -- that integrates our
- 24 standard reservations?
- MR. GERSHENGORN: Exactly. It

- 1 includes standard reservations -- it includes
- 2 but is not limited to standard reservations.
- 3 The whole point --
- 4 JUSTICE KAGAN: And how do we know
- 5 that?
- 6 MR. GERSHENGORN: Because that's what
- 7 the Court said in Sandoval, is that the -- is
- 8 that -- that it was -- it was trying to figure
- 9 out whether Congress had the power to legislate
- 10 for the Pueblos, and -- and what it said was
- 11 Congress has the power to legislate both
- 12 domestic and -- old and new communities and use
- 13 the term "dependent Indian communities."
- But, again, regardless, the Tribe has
- 15 always -- the Creek have always been -- the
- 16 reason the -- the Pueblos were compared to the
- 17 Creek is because the Creek were assumed to be
- 18 the quintessential reservation. In other words,
- 19 the fee patent in the Pueblos couldn't be a
- 20 problem because it wasn't a problem for the
- 21 Creeks, and everybody understood the Creeks were
- 22 -- had a reservation. I think that was the
- 23 sense in which the Court was using the term.
- 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- counsel.

1	Justice Gorsuch?
2	JUSTICE GORSUCH: Hello?
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
4	Gorsuch?
5	JUSTICE GORSUCH: Thank you, Chief.
6	Counsel, we've heard a little bit
7	about it today, but I'd I'd like to give you
8	a chance to discuss further the argument that
9	there are going to be terrible practical
10	consequences that would follow from a ruling for
11	your clients. We can put aside the criminal
12	convictions you've addressed those but
13	just the on-the-ground difficulties we've heard
14	about in administering Tulsa.
15	A, do you want to respond to the
16	that parade of horribles generally? And, B, how
17	should that inform our analysis of and
18	interpretation of a statute and a treaty?
19	MR. GERSHENGORN: So, Your Honor, I
20	would broadly, here's what I would say:
21	There are there there will, of course, be
22	consequences from the Court's ruling, as there
23	are from any of the Court's rulings, and those
24	consequences are not trivial, but nor are they
25	existential, nor, indeed, overly serious.

1 But, more important, they are the 2 kinds of consequences that happen routinely in Indian Country. They are routinely resolved by 3 agreement in Oklahoma, as Representative Cole's 4 brief indicates, and throughout the nation, as 5 6 the MCI brief and the experience of Tacoma 7 indicates. And -- and these are routinely 8 addressed by Congress. 9 With respect to how it should --10 should influence the text, it should not affect the reading of the text, and that's true for 11 12 several reasons. First, the text is what the 13 text is, and this Court's job is to interpret 14 it. 15 Second, in Parker itself, the Court distinguished the two. It separated reservation 16 status from questions of sovereignty and the 17 18 impact on the ground. And I think this Court 19 should take the same approach. Those two 20 questions are distinct. 21 And then, third, it shouldn't affect 22 this Court's analysis of the text because 23 Congress is in the best place to change the text 24 and add text if it wants. And, indeed, Congress routinely does in Indian Country, and Congress 25

- 1 has in Oklahoma. There are Oklahoma-specific
- 2 statutes that address environmental matters,
- 3 that take power -- that ensure that power stays
- 4 with the state, not the tribe. Congress knows
- 5 how to do this, and the job to fix any
- 6 consequences if the Court perceives them is with
- 7 Congress.
- 8 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 9 counsel.
- 10 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Thank you.
- 11 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 12 Kavanaugh?
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Thank you, Chief.
- 14 And good morning, Mr. Gershengorn. I
- want to talk a bit about the history and maybe
- 16 make a comment, and you and other -- your
- 17 colleagues can react.
- 18 But this is not a situation where
- there's a reservation in an existing state and
- 20 Congress has arguably diminished a reservation.
- 21 This is a case with a territory that, by 1890,
- 22 Indian territory was predominantly white, about
- 23 60 percent of the population, also a significant
- 24 black population, about 10 percent, and about
- 25 30 percent Indian.

1 And the question, as of 1890, how do 2 we get there to that situation, you go back to the treaties of 1832 and 1833 that grant the 3 Creeks and the Five Tribes land, but then the 4 5 Civil War is key, and the tribes, the Five Tribes, all align with the Confederacy in the 6 Civil War. The tribes have black slaves, lots 7 8 of black slaves. And then there's a new treaty 9 in 1866 because the United States is not happy 10 that the tribes have aligned with the 11 Confederacy. 12 Why does that matter for us? Because, 13 in that new treaty in 1866, it grants 14 rights-of-way to railroads, the railroads lead 15 to settlements, the settlements lead to new 16 towns that are predominantly white. So, by 17 1890, you have an odd situation of an Indian territory nominally that's predominantly white. 18 19 So Congress's options at that time are -- are to remove the -- the whites, to remove 20 21 the Indians. Neither of those was going to 22 happen. So the other remaining options were 23 tribal government over non-Indians, which, of 24 course, is contrary to tradition, or to create a 25 new state. And Congress chose the new state

- 1 option, it seems, and then had a lot of things
- that happened over the next 17 years.
- 3 So I just wanted to get that history
- 4 out there because I think we're talking about
- 5 Indian territory and reservations when, in fact,
- 6 it was 60 percent white, 10 percent black,
- 7 30 percent Indian in the relevant territory.
- 8 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Counsel, you
- 9 have time for a very brief comment.
- 10 MR. GERSHENGORN: So I'll just say
- 11 very briefly, Your Honor, after statehood, the
- 12 -- 85 percent of the Indian territory remained
- in Indian hands, immune from taxation. The idea
- 14 that statehood and reservation status are
- inconsistent is refuted by the fact that
- 16 Tennessee was 75 percent reservation at
- 17 statehood. At statehood in South Dakota, it was
- 18 47 percent reservation.
- 19 I think Your Honor's sense of the
- 20 history and the incompatibility of reservations
- 21 with statehood is not historically accurate.
- 22 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 23 counsel.
- Mr. Kanji.

1	ORAL ARGUMENT OF RIYAZ A. KANJI
2	FOR THE MUSCOGEE (CREEK) NATION,
3	AS AMICUS CURIAE, SUPPORTING THE PETITIONER
4	MR. KANJI: Thank you, Mr. Chief
5	Justice, and may it please the Court:
6	I would like to go straight to Justice
7	Thomas's question about the governing framework
8	here and make three points. First, there is
9	nothing radical about the Parker/Solem
10	framework. It fused two ordinary principles of
11	statutory construction and fundamental
12	principles regarding the separation of powers.
13	The state can't win under that test,
14	and, hence, it has advocated various amorphous
15	alternatives. I think, Justice Thomas, nothing
16	about the fact that there was a series of
17	statutes here changes the the fundamental
18	principles that should apply.
19	There are, to answer your question
20	directly, other cases that have involved a
21	series of statutes. The Mast case involved a
22	tremendous amount about the history of
23	California's series of statutes and executive
24	orders over time.
25	Solem involved the creation of a of

- 1 a reservation only eight months before
- 2 statehood. Every state likes to claim that its
- 3 history is exceptional, but there's nothing
- 4 about Oklahoma here that should cause a
- 5 divergence from this Court's test.
- In the past, we --
- 7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 8 counsel. I'd -- I'd like to return to Justice
- 9 Alito's question. Congress passed legislation
- 10 at the turn of the prior century saying that the
- 11 United States laws and the laws of Arkansas,
- which would be applied in Oklahoma, would apply
- to all persons therein, irrespective of race.
- Now, if you prevail, the laws in the
- 15 eastern half of Oklahoma will be different. The
- applicable law will be different, dependent upon
- 17 race. So how is that consistent with Congress's
- 18 legislation?
- 19 MR. KANJI: Thank you, Mr. Chief
- 20 Justice. It's a critical question. What the
- 21 1897 statute did was to apply federal law,
- 22 irrespective of race, the territorial law and
- 23 Arkansas law as assimilated.
- There was nothing radical about that.
- 25 Under the General Crimes Act and the

- 1 Assimilative Crimes Act, state law was often
- 2 applied where federal law did not exist.
- But then what happens, of course, is
- 4 this watershed moment of statehood, and
- 5 statehood always changes the status quo. And
- 6 when it comes to Indians, what it does typically
- 7 is reserves federal power over the Indians
- 8 while, of course, giving state power over
- 9 non-Indians to the states.
- 10 And there's nothing in the Enabling
- 11 Act or the Five Tribes Act that suggests that
- that status quo, the normal way of dealing with
- it, was supposed to be departed from.
- 14 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But I -- I
- 15 would like an answer to the precise question,
- which is the law would be different in eastern
- 17 Oklahoma depending upon race, right?
- MR. KANJI: Well, under the Enabling
- 19 Act, yes, the -- the transfer to the state was
- 20 of cases that would arise under state law. What
- 21 the federal courts retained were cases arising
- 22 under federal law. And that, of course,
- 23 included the Major Crimes Act and the -- and the
- 24 General Crimes Act.
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,

1 counsel. 2 Justice Thomas? JUSTICE THOMAS: Yes, Mr. Kanji, a 3 brief question, and this is just -- it's not 4 5 necessarily dispositive of this case, but I'm 6 interested in your answer. Do you think a tribe can be 7 effectively divested of title to land, to its 8 9 land and its sovereignty, and still retain the 10 status of reservation? MR. KANJI: It's a -- it's a 11 12 critically interesting question, Your Honor. All -- all disestablishment cases involve a 13 transformation of title. Whether we're talking 14 15 about trust cases or fee pay cases, Congress was getting rid of communal proper -- title and 16 17 transferring title to individuals. 18 So the question this Court resolves in 19 that regard is whether Congress also meant to go 20 beyond that and alter reservation boundaries 21 which were so there. And, here, where we simply 22 are talking about the allotment and the opening 23 up of small town sites to non-Indian settlers,

that falls squarely into the rubric that this

Court has designed where reservations have

24

- 1 remained intact.
- With respect to sovereighty, if a
- 3 sovereignty was to be completely divested -- and
- 4 that's not what happened here -- but, if it was,
- 5 I think the question this Court would ask is
- 6 whether the federal government still meant to
- 7 maintain the reservation for its own purposes.
- If it didn't, then the reservation
- 9 would dissolve. Here, if the tribe had been
- 10 dissolved, the treaties make very clear that the
- 11 reservation itself would have evaporated, but --
- 12 but -- and -- and I understand this is not the
- premise of your question, that is not what took
- 14 place here. The 1901 and 1906 acts clearly
- maintained a quantum of tribal governmental
- 16 power.
- 17 JUSTICE THOMAS: Thank you.
- 18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 19 Ginsburg?
- 20 JUSTICE GINSBURG: If you -- you are
- 21 right, then what becomes of all the state tribal
- 22 cooperative agreements that we're told about if
- 23 the state lacks authority to apply its own law
- 24 with increased territory, remaining as a cession
- 25 to everything except what was given in the Civil

- 1 War.
- Were all of the -- we're told that
- 3 there are many, many state tribal cooperative
- 4 agreements, but if the state lacks authority to
- 5 apply its own law, what becomes of -- of all
- 6 those state tribe cooperative agreements?
- 7 MR. KANJI: The -- the agreements,
- 8 Your Honor, will remain in full force and
- 9 effect. And this is critical. If we prevail,
- 10 state law does not evaporate in the reservation.
- 11 Under this Court's doctrines, state law applies
- in many situations with respect to -- especially
- with respect to the non-Indians in the area.
- 14 And that's what leads to these
- 15 cooperative agreements. Reservations involve
- 16 the different jurisdictions all having
- authority, and that has been the premise of
- 18 shared jurisdiction as underpinned these
- 19 cooperative agreements.
- 20 And the best thing I can point you to
- is not my words but the words of Congressman
- 22 Cole's brief. And that's a remarkable brief. I
- 23 think very few briefs like that have been filed
- in this Court in the area of state tribal
- 25 relations where you have senior members of

- 1 Congress, former governors, former state
- 2 legislators saying, please do not disestablish
- 3 this reservation because the exercise of tribal
- 4 sovereignty in cooperation with the state has
- 5 underpinned these agreements.
- 6 And the authors of that brief were the
- 7 authors of many of the agreements on the state
- 8 side. And it's this premise of shared
- 9 jurisdiction that has allowed for shared
- 10 governance in Oklahoma to the benefit of all
- 11 citizens there. And just as --
- 12 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 13 counsel.
- Justice Breyer?
- JUSTICE BREYER: So I'm still
- interested in this claim the State makes that
- 17 whether it's a reservation or not a reservation
- 18 is beside the point, that all we have to decide
- 19 here is whether Congress gave to a state court
- 20 the power to try the state criminal crimes.
- 21 And Felix Cohen points to three things
- where he thinks the answer to that question is
- 23 yes, seems to. First, they abolished tribal
- 24 courts and put the criminal jurisdiction in the
- 25 Indian court, the Indian territory courts, which

- 1 are federal courts.
- 2 Then, in the 1906 Act, it says that
- 3 those territorial courts, which are federal,
- 4 have the power to try state law cases. Now
- 5 they're not called state law cases then.
- 6 They're called laws of the territory of
- 7 Oklahoma.
- 8 And then, in the 1907 Act, which is
- 9 after, you know, the Enabling Act, it says all
- 10 causes, civil or criminal, shall be proceeded
- 11 with, held and determined by the courts of the
- 12 state coming about, the successors of the
- district courts of the territory of Oklahoma,
- 14 and the United States courts in the Indian
- 15 territory.
- So it's rather ambiguous, this last
- 17 thing. But given the practice and given Felix
- 18 Cohen and given you could read it that way, what
- 19 do you think?
- 20 MR. KANJI: I -- Your Honor, it would
- 21 make my life much easier in this case if I could
- 22 say there was plain text that had transferred
- 23 jurisdiction to the state over the Indians. As
- you know, there would be nothing inconsistent
- 25 with that and reservation status.

Т	OUSTICE BREIER. NO.
2	MR. KANJI: But we simply can't find
3	that text. I think the operative text, as
4	Justice Alito said, ends up being the amended
5	Section 16 of the Enabling Act, prosecutions for
6	all crimes which had they been committed in the
7	state would have been cognizable in the federal
8	courts.
9	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Alito?
LO	Justice Alito?
L1	Justice Sotomayor?
L2	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Counsel, could you
L3	finish your answer to Justice Breyer, please?
L4	MR. KANJI: Absolutely, Justice
L5	Sotomayor. The cases that would have been
L6	cognizable in federal court, if Oklahoma had
L7	been a state, included prosecutions under the
L8	Major Crimes Act or the General Crimes Act. The
L9	Enabling Act is very clearly saying that those
20	are to be transferred to federal court.
21	As to the practice, this is critical.
22	Nationwide, around the nation, states were
23	arrogating criminal jurisdiction to themselves
24	and the federal government was abdicating it,
25	even in cases where the reservations clearly

- 1 remained intact. That happened in South Dakota,
- 2 the Solem case. That happened in Nebraska, the
- 3 Parker case. That happened in Washington State,
- 4 the Seymour case. That happened in Mississippi,
- 5 United States v. John case. In all four of
- 6 those cases, this Court unanimously, across
- 7 different eras, different compositions of this
- 8 Court, paid no heed to that practice for this
- 9 fundamental reason: the acts of Executive
- 10 Branch officials cannot subvert the will of
- 11 Congress. Those acts of Executive Branch
- 12 officials do not run the gauntlet of
- 13 bicameralism and presentment.
- 14 And here is all the more reason not to
- 15 pay those heed. We know -- we know that federal
- officials were subverting the will of Congress
- in Oklahoma. After statehood, they would not
- 18 allow the Creek Nation to hold elections for its
- 19 chief, for its national council, even though the
- 20 Five Tribes Act clearly preserved those powers.
- 21 So why we should pay heed to the acts
- 22 of federal officials when they were clearly
- 23 acting illegally is something that the state has
- 24 -- has never explained.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Counsel, could we

- 1 go back to Justice Thomas's question? Am I to
- 2 understand that in existing reservations outside
- 3 of this Creek Nation issue, there are fee-simple
- 4 possessions by non-Indians, non-Indians are
- 5 living, working on those reservations? And am I
- 6 to understand there's concurrent federal, state,
- 7 and Indian jurisdiction over many of the issues
- 8 involved with those people?
- 9 MR. KANJI: Correct, Your Honor.
- 10 Wherever there's fee-simple land in -- in a
- 11 reservation, there is concurrent jurisdiction.
- 12 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So you really
- 13 can't tie --
- 14 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So, Justice
- 15 Alito?
- 16 JUSTICE ALITO: Am I correct that more
- than 90 percent of the people who live in the
- 18 area directly affected by this case are not
- members of the Creek tribe?
- 20 MR. KANJI: That is correct, Your
- Honor.
- JUSTICE ALITO: Well, what would you
- 23 say to those people when we -- if we decide this
- 24 case in your -- in your favor? Won't they be
- 25 surprised to learn that they are living on a

- 1 reservation and that they are now subject to
- 2 laws imposed by a body that is not accountable
- 3 to them in any way?
- 4 MR. KANJI: There -- there are a
- 5 number of responses, Your Honor. First, very
- 6 little will change for them. Certainly, very
- 7 little to the bad will change for them. They
- 8 will largely remain subject to state law. They
- 9 will benefit in significant ways from
- 10 reservation status. Justice Breyer asked a
- 11 question at the last argument about the Tulsa
- 12 businessman. Well, that businessman could wake
- 13 up the day after the argument and qualify for
- 14 enterprise grants that attach to reservation
- 15 status.
- JUSTICE ALITO: But what -- what would
- 17 be the -- what will be the extent of the tribe's
- authority over these non-Indians? For example,
- if any member of the tribe has a contract
- dispute with a non-member, say it's about an
- 21 employment contract or a lease or the purchase
- of goods, will the -- the tribal member be able
- 23 to sue the non-Indian in tribal court under
- 24 tribal law?
- MR. KANJI: In -- no, Your Honor. In

- 1 -- assuming that this takes place on fee lands,
- 2 which is the -- as you've noted, the majority of
- 3 lands in the reservation, under this Court's
- 4 precedents, it's clear that absent affirmative
- 5 consent, no, that case would proceed in state
- 6 court.
- 7 The tribe presumptively -- tribal law
- 8 presumptively would not apply to non-Indians
- 9 with respect to activities taking place on fee
- 10 land.
- 11 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, if this were a
- 12 different reservation and a non-Indian chose to
- do business there, knew that he or she was
- 14 entering a reservation, was doing business
- there, that would be considered to be consent,
- 16 would it not?
- 17 MR. KANJI: Well, the -- this Court's
- 18 precedents are, honestly, a little unclear on
- 19 that. But, if there was some form of
- 20 affirmative expression of consent, that would
- 21 bring the case within tribal jurisdiction.
- JUSTICE ALITO: But there will be --
- 23 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Kagan?
- 24 JUSTICE KAGAN: Mr. Kanji, could I ask
- you to continue and -- you're talking about the

- 1 consequences of this, and focus particularly
- 2 about adoptions and foster care proceedings,
- 3 because I know there's been some concern about
- 4 that.
- 5 MR. KANJI: Thank you, Your Honor.
- 6 There -- there's been some, well, frankly,
- 7 rhetoric about that. But it's misplaced. On
- 8 the ground, the state agency, the Health and
- 9 Human Services Agency, and the Nation cooperate
- in every ICWA case. They have a terrific
- 11 relationship, and they have both been involved
- in the placement of Indian children.
- That will not change if the
- 14 reservation boundaries are affirmed. There are
- 15 various mechanisms to formalize that -- those
- 16 agreements. Section 1919 allows the state and
- 17 the Nation to continue sharing jurisdiction, for
- 18 the state courts to retain jurisdiction where
- 19 there are existing placements, or under
- 20 Section 1915 for the Nation to ordain those
- 21 placements.
- There is simply no cause to think that
- 23 existing placements will be disrupted. That is
- 24 not in the interests of the Nation, the parents,
- or the children, and it will not happen.

1 JUSTICE KAGAN: And with respect to 2 all of these disruption questions, what role do you think that our decision in City of Sherrill 3 4 plays? MR. KANJI: Well, I -- Sherrill has a 5 -- has a -- Sherrill is always in the room when 6 the states and the tribes are negotiating 7 8 agreements. It's really, honestly, a thumb on the scale on the side of the states. So, when 9 10 it comes to all the fabric of cooperative agreements we have in place currently, those 11 12 will continue. We have terrific working 13 relationships, as the Cole brief exemplifies, 14 and it will continue to play that role. 15 Now, if there were ever a situation 16 where the Nation were to assert sovereignty in a 17 way that went beyond the bounds of those 18 agreements and that the state took umbrage with, 19 you know, Sherrill is an arsenal in -- in the 20 state's --- that the states can employ in -- in 21 those stations. 22 But what Sherrill makes very clear is 23 that there's a clear distinction between 24 reservation boundaries and whether they exist or 25 not and what equitable defenses might apply to

- 1 the assertion of tribal authority within those
- 2 boundaries.
- 3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 4 Gorsuch?
- 5 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Counsel, there's
- 6 been a fair amount of discussion so far this
- 7 morning about the Oklahoma Enabling Act and the
- 8 suggestion that it's inconceivable that Congress
- 9 would have admitted a new state to the Union
- where a significant portion of the state would
- 11 have been a federal reservation subject to the
- 12 Major Crimes Act.
- 13 And I'm not sure we've given you all a
- 14 fair chance to have at that, so I'd -- I'd
- appreciate a thorough response to that question.
- MR. KANJI: Thank you, Justice
- 17 Gorsuch.
- There's nothing inconsistent between
- 19 the advent of statehood and reservation
- 20 boundaries. The Solem case makes that patently
- 21 clear. The Cheyenne River reservation and the
- 22 Rosebud Sioux reservation were ordained eight
- 23 months before statehood. Congress clearly --
- 24 and they -- they accounted for about 10 percent
- of states' land mass alone.

Т	Congress clearly understood at this
2	time that states could come into being with
3	significant reservation masses. Arizona became
4	a state shortly after Oklahoma, and that was
5	27 percent of the state's land mass.
6	This Court, by that time, had
7	recognized that state jurisdiction in the
8	criminal area and the civil area could pertain
9	to non-Indians on reservations and had
10	established this framework of concurrent
11	jurisdiction that still persists to today.
12	JUSTICE GORSUCH: Thank you, counsel.
13	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
14	Kavanaugh?
15	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Thank you, Chief
16	Justice, and good morning.
17	As I mentioned in the last comment, I
18	think we have to understand what the situation
19	was as of 1890, '90, to understand the text of
20	these statutes, but I want to focus on the text
21	in particular, the text of the statute that
22	abolishes the tribal courts and the text of the
23	statute that creates, in essence, municipal
24	towns within Indian territory during the 1890s
25	and what the significance of those two statutes

- 1 are for assessing sovereignty, because,
- 2 ultimately, the question, as Justice Thomas
- 3 suggested, I think, is what -- what's the status
- 4 of legislative, executive, and judicial power.
- 5 How should we think about those
- 6 statutes with the tribal courts and the
- 7 municipal towns?
- 8 MR. KANJI: Mr. Chief Justice, I need
- 9 just one minute to answer this question because
- 10 it's -- it's critical, and it's an excellent
- 11 question, Justice Kavanaugh. With respect to --
- 12 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: That's exactly
- 13 how much time you have.
- 14 (Laughter.)
- 15 MR. KANJI: Thank you. With respect
- to the courts, it's critical to remember most
- 17 tribes did not have tribal courts at this period
- 18 of time. It was a rarity that the Five Tribes
- 19 did. So, in restricting and in eliminating
- 20 those tribal courts, Congress was merely putting
- 21 them on the same plane as other tribes.
- 22 And then, more generally speaking,
- 23 with respect to the quantum of governmental
- 24 powers, as you know, Justice Kavanaugh, Congress
- 25 has regularly adjusted the metes and bounds of

- 1 tribal sovereignty. That's what this Court
- 2 recognized in Lara but has never equated the
- 3 quantum of power with the existence of the
- 4 reservations themselves. And if this --
- 5 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: On the tribal
- 6 courts point, the difference, I think some would
- 7 say, is that the other tribes were not governing
- 8 a jurisdiction that was predominantly
- 9 non-Indian, which is what was going on here.
- 10 Any reaction to that?
- 11 MR. KANJI: Yes, look at exactly what
- 12 happened in 1901 and thereafter with the
- 13 Allotment Act. The tribal courts were gone, but
- 14 the Secretary of the Interior continued to
- 15 enforce the tribe's legislative authority.
- 16 Section 42 made it very clear that that
- 17 legislative authority persisted. The Secretary
- 18 enforced the tribal laws. And this Court's
- decision in Hitchcock and the Eighth Circuit's
- 20 decision in Buster make it crystal-clear that
- 21 the tribe's legislative authority persisted
- 22 after the Acts in question were -- were enacted.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Thank you.
- 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 25 counsel.

1	General Mansinghani.
2	ORAL ARGUMENT OF MITHUN MANSINGHANI
3	ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENT
4	MR. MANSINGHANI: Thank you, Mr. Chief
5	Justice, and may it please the Court:
6	Oklahoma has jurisdiction over the
7	eastern half of the state because it never was
8	reservation land and is certainly not
9	reservation land today. To start, the land was
10	not public land preserved from sale, where title
11	remains with the United States, but instead
12	patented in fee to the Creek Nation.
13	That is why this Court in U.S. v.
14	Creek Nation called it a former dependent Indian
15	community. And under Venetie, it clearly lost
16	that status when the fee patent was dismantled.
17	Now, assuming the land was a
18	reservation, Congress stripped away all
19	semblance of reservation status. Solem asks us
20	whether Congress's purpose was to divest the
21	tribe of all its interest in the land, and,
22	here, statute after statute did precisely that.
23	The Curtis Act ended tribal governance
24	of the land, the allotment agreement divested
25	the tribe of all its rights, title, and

- 1 interest, and even allotments were quickly
- 2 stripped of federal superintendents. Everyone
- 3 at the time read these statutes to mean the
- 4 state had jurisdiction and the land was not a
- 5 reservation.
- 6 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 7 counsel. Mr. Gershengorn, in response to a
- 8 question from Justice Kagan, argued that
- 9 "dependent Indian community" was an umbrella
- 10 term that included reservation. I'd like to get
- 11 your response to that.
- 12 MR. MANSINGHANI: See, I think that
- definition would completely make 1151(b)
- 14 surplusage. It would read it right out of the
- 15 statute. What this Court said in Venetie is
- 16 that tribes with land in fee are "unalike"
- 17 Indians living on reservations, "citing
- 18 Sandoval, which compares the -- the -- the
- 19 Pueblos, who had a dependent Indian community,
- 20 as essentially the same as the Five Tribes.
- 21 And in Creek Nation, this Court said
- 22 that the Five Tribes had a fee simple, not the
- 23 usual Indian right of occupancy, which is what
- 24 is typical of reservations, and it was a
- 25 dependent Indian community.

1 And then Congress went out and 2 codified Sandoval as a -- as a type of land 3 status separate and apart from reservations, which is what this Court held in Venetie. 4 5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, 6 counsel. Justice Thomas? 7 8 JUSTICE THOMAS: Yes. Counsel, the --9 I'm very interested in your point that this --10 we should characterize this as a dependent nation. First -- I'd like you, first, to say 11 12 whether -- why you think that and why it 13 matters. 14 And -- and opposing counsel seems to 15 think that it's irrelevant and, as he said, as I 16 recall, that it's also wrong, your assessment of 17 that. So it gives you an opportunity to both 18 respond to that and to explain to us why it is 19 important. 20 MR. MANSINGHANI: So why is it a 21 dependent Indian community. First, as I said, 22 the -- Venetie said that tribes holding their 23 land under restricted fee are unlike Indians 24 living on reservations. Sandoval and Creek 25 Nation confirmed that. And as far as -- it

- doesn't meet the definition of a reservation.
- 2 I'll take the definition from Hagen v.
- 3 Utah, land belonging to United States that is
- 4 reserved from sale and set apart for public
- 5 uses. And in Pine River, this Court said
- 6 "reserved from sale" means the fee remains in
- 7 the United States.
- 8 Well, issuing a fee patent is not
- 9 reserving it from sale. It's selling it. Why?
- 10 It makes sense. Making land alienable to
- 11 non-Indians in a dependent Indian community ends
- 12 the dependent Indian community status. That's
- 13 what this Court said in Venetie and that's what
- 14 then Judge -- Judge Gorsuch at the Tenth Circuit
- 15 said in Hydro Resources on page 1163 in
- 16 Footnotes 11 and 30 of his opinion.
- 17 And that makes textual and logical
- 18 sense because there's a textual difference
- between 1151(a), which says that a reservation
- 20 remains one notwithstanding the issuance of any
- 21 patent, and 1151(b), which doesn't contain that
- 22 language and defines dependent Indian
- 23 communities. Again, Judge Gorsuch pointed that
- 24 out in Hydro Resources.
- It also makes logical sense because,

- 1 if what created the land was the fee patent, the
- 2 opposite of that, the conveyance of the fee
- 3 patent disestablishes. That's in accordance
- 4 with this Court's decision in Hagen v. Utah,
- 5 where it said reservation is reserving land from
- 6 the public domain, so restoring land to the
- 7 public domain ends the reservation.
- 8 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 9 Ginsburg?
- 10 JUSTICE GINSBURG: If -- if the tribe
- 11 -- if the reservation had been disestablished,
- would the tribe have any governing authority
- and, if so, over what? Would the Major Crimes
- 14 Act apply, or would exclusive prosecutorial
- authority for state crimes lie in the state
- 16 courts?
- 17 MR. MANSINGHANI: So the tribe would
- 18 have their governments in -- in that they would
- 19 have control over their own internal affairs and
- 20 managing their property interests, which, if you
- 21 look to the tribal understanding at the time, as
- 22 we -- as we quote in our Respondent's appendix,
- is exactly what the tribe understood their own
- 24 authority to be.
- 25 As far as would they have any

- 1 authority over land, there is some land that is
- 2 under their original fee patent, so the River
- 3 Spirit Casino in Tulsa is built on the riverbed
- 4 of the Arkansas River because that land was
- 5 never allotted. So they have governing
- 6 authority over that land, over trust land, and
- 7 over restricted allotments, but we think the
- 8 state, nonetheless, has jurisdiction over all of
- 9 the state pursuant to the transfer of state --
- 10 to -- to state jurisdiction in the Enabling Act,
- 11 which, you know, the -- the -- what Congress had
- done in the Indian territory is say the Indian
- 13 territory is an area where Indians and
- 14 non-Indians are treated alike. Then the
- 15 Enabling Act in Section 21 extended federal law
- 16 except where not local -- where locally
- 17 inapplicable.
- 18 And it was locally -- the Major Crimes
- 19 Act was locally inapplicable in the Indian
- 20 territory because the 1897 Act is the act that
- 21 conferred jurisdiction, not the Major Crimes
- 22 Act, which is why Petitioner can't cite a single
- 23 Major Crimes Act case during this period, before
- 24 statehood or after.
- 25 JUSTICE GINSBURG: This question was

- 1 asked before, but what are -- what are the
- 2 congressional prescriptions that, in Oklahoma,
- 3 all residents are subject to the same law,
- 4 irrespective of race?
- 5 MR. MANSINGHANI: I think that lays
- 6 the framework of what Congress was trying to do
- 7 in make -- in -- in creating the State of
- 8 Oklahoma, which was to transform the governance
- 9 of the state and the land ownership of the
- 10 state, which was exclusively tribal, to a place
- 11 where both Indians and non-Indians could both
- own land and be governed by the same state
- 13 government.
- 14 If you look at pages 23 -- 22 to 25 of
- our brief, we lay out that history and -- and
- 16 lay out that that is what Congress said
- 17 explicitly in legislative reports, that's what
- 18 the Dallas Commission report said, and that's
- 19 what the tribes recognize in their own tribal
- 20 understanding.
- 21 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 22 Breyer?
- JUSTICE BREYER: No, thank you.
- 24 I'll -- I'll pass.
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Alito?

- 1 Justice Alito?
- JUSTICE ALITO: Yes. Mr. Gershengorn
- 3 has a section of his brief that's labeled The
- 4 Sky Is Not Falling, and his argument is that you
- 5 and the federal government are exaggerating the
- 6 effect of this decision, that it won't have such
- 7 a major impact either in the criminal or in the
- 8 civil area.
- 9 Is he right in that?
- 10 MR. MANSINGHANI: No, Justice Alito.
- 11 So let me -- let me put some -- some solid
- 12 numbers on this. We have currently over 1700
- inmates whose crimes were committed in the
- 14 former Indian territory who identify as Native
- 15 American. So the state presumptively would not
- have jurisdiction over those people and have to
- 17 release them.
- 18 And that is probably half the actual
- 19 number because it doesn't include crimes
- 20 committed against Indians, which the state would
- 21 not have jurisdiction over, so we're talking
- here about potentially around 30 -- over 3,000
- inmates we may have to turn over.
- As far as future cases go, there were
- 32,000 felonies committed in the former Indian

- 1 territory, an area that is about 12 percent
- 2 Native American. So only including crimes
- 3 committed by Native Americans, that would be
- 4 4,000 new felonies a year that the federal
- 5 government would have to prosecute. Including
- 6 crimes that -- where the Native American is the
- 7 victim, you can take that to about 8,000.
- 8 On the civil side, what -- on the
- 9 civil side, what happens is it creates precisely
- 10 the differential legal treatment between
- 11 non-Indians and Indians that Congress tried to
- 12 abolish when it -- when it created the State of
- 13 Oklahoma.
- 14 So non-Indians would not be subject
- 15 to -- presumptively to state zoning law, to dog
- law, as Justice Breyer mentioned, and that
- 17 creates a disparity between Indians and
- 18 non-Indians. So now Indian -- non-Indian
- businesses are competing on an unequal playing
- 20 field with Indian businesses. That's just one
- 21 example.
- The Tulsa brief points out examples
- of, on restricted allotments, how Indians are
- 24 erecting billboards in residential
- 25 neighborhoods, are selling fireworks in them,

- 1 but -- but that's in the few areas, the 2
- 2 percent of land that remains restricted
- 3 allotment.
- If the entire area is a reservation,
- 5 then you're -- you're creating the two separate
- 6 societies that Congress had sought to abolish
- 7 when it passed the dozen statutes it did in
- 8 creating Oklahoma.
- 9 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 10 Sotomayor?
- 11 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Counsel, with the
- 12 latter part of all of the parade of horribles
- 13 that you set forth, Congress can come in and
- 14 change all of that. Congress can give the state
- jurisdiction over anything it might be missing
- if we were to hold this was a reservation. They
- 17 have done so with respect to many other
- 18 reservations across the country. So this is
- 19 easily fixable by Congress.
- 20 Putting that aside, what do we do with
- 21 the treaty language here that resulted as --
- 22 after the Trail of Tears with the Creek Nation?
- 23 That Nation was wrenched from its homeland,
- 24 marched to Oklahoma, and then given a treaty as
- 25 recompense which guaranteed its sovereignty.

1 I'm not sure that there's any other 2 dependent Indian community that depends on a treaty right that extends or recognizes 3 sovereignty. So can you point to any, number 4 Number two, if there isn't, why aren't we 5 back at Solem and Parker? Is there anything 6 explicitly that terminated the reservation in 7 8 the history that you've recounted? 9 MR. MANSINGHANI: Let me try to take 10 those questions in order. Congress can't fix the retroactive consequences here. As far as 11 12 the -- the -- the dependent Indian community, I 13 think the Pueblos have sovereignty over their 14 land. It may not have been via treaty, but the 15 idea that a dependent Indian community versus reservation turns on treaty rights would 16 actually -- is actually nowhere present in this 17 18 Court's case law. It -- and -- and -- and on 19 top of that, would actually undermine lots of 20 reservations that were not created by treaty but 21 by executive order. So Petitioner's position 22 would actually undermine Indian Country around 23 the country. 24 And then, third, as far as specific 25 language, I think I'm going to go to Justice

- 1 Thomas's point, which is cession, as this Court
- 2 said in Rosebud Sioux, means the surrender of
- 3 territory or jurisdiction. And, here, you have
- 4 the explicit surrender of territory and
- 5 jurisdiction.
- 6 The Curtis Act said tribal law shall
- 7 not be enforced. The -- the allotment
- 8 agreement said all right, title, and interest is
- 9 divested. You combine those two things
- 10 together, that's enough to say that there was no
- 11 reservation status. But, on top of that, you
- 12 have a bunch of other statutes that do even more
- things than that, that make it absolutely clear.
- 14 The --
- 15 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Kagan?
- 16 JUSTICE KAGAN: General, if we could
- 17 go back to this dependent Indian community
- 18 question, which is a complicated one because, of
- 19 course, our -- our use of language can change
- 20 over such an extended period of time, but when I
- 21 look back at some of these cases that were
- 22 decided around the same time that Creek Nation
- 23 was decided, it seems as though the case for
- 24 Mr. Gershengorn's view, which is that this term
- 25 was meant to be an umbrella term, is -- is a

- 1 pretty strong one. And, specifically, a case
- 2 called McGowan, which relied on another case
- 3 called Pelican, talked about the broad use of
- 4 the term "dependent Indian community" and said
- 5 that whether it was -- whether something was a
- 6 reservation or a colony was irrelevant because
- 7 both were dependent Indian communities.
- 8 And then Felix Cohen says in his
- 9 treatise, speaking of these cases, he says --
- 10 and I'm quoting here -- "All Indian reservations
- 11 are also dependent Indian communities, unless
- 12 they are uninhabited."
- So could you comment on that?
- MR. MANSINGHANI: I think you have to
- 15 read it as well taking into account Venetie,
- 16 which says that tribal -- tribes with their land
- in fee are unlike Indians living on
- 18 reservations.
- 19 I -- I don't think you could read
- 20 1151(b) as just completely the same as what's in
- 21 1151(a) and -- and -- and (c), but more than
- that, a reservation has to be land reserved from
- 23 sale. And, here, the land wasn't reserved from
- 24 sale. It -- it was sold. It was -- it was
- 25 given to the Creek Nation in exchange for their

- 1 lands in fee simple.
- 2 So if -- if you read the --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, that's a
- 4 different kind of argument. Excuse me, General.
- 5 That's a different kind of argument. That's --
- 6 that's the argument that fee simple is itself
- 7 inconsistent with reservation status.
- And aren't there other tribes that
- 9 also have been given land in fee simple that
- 10 have been recognized as reservations?
- MR. MANSINGHANI: No. And thank you
- 12 for the opportunity to address that. So the
- 13 Creek Nation points to the Seneca in New York as
- having fee simple, but they yielded their land
- 15 not by cession but by selling all their right to
- private parties in 1797 and in 1842.
- So, under their theory, all of western
- 18 New York and the City of Buffalo is still an
- 19 Indian reservation, which would be highly
- 20 disruptive. The -- they also point to the
- 21 Wyandotte, an 1817 treaty, but they neglect to
- 22 mention the 1818 supplemental treaty that
- 23 relinquished the right to a patent and instead
- 24 gave them a -- a reservation.
- 25 So our position would disrupt no land

- 1 anywhere. And -- and, in 2015, by the way, the
- 2 Second Circuit looked at the Senecas' restricted
- 3 fee land in the Buffalo area and it said, you
- 4 know what it is? It's a dependent Indian
- 5 community. Since then, the thought of every
- 6 court --
- 7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 8 counsel.
- 9 Justice Gorsuch?
- 10 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Counsel, I have four
- 11 questions. I'm going to tick them off as fast
- 12 as I can, and you can choose which ones you want
- 13 to respond to in the time you have.
- 14 First, can you explain to me why the
- fact that the land is in fee simple would lead
- to a less stringent disestablishment test than
- 17 Solem? I guess I don't understand why that
- 18 would be the case.
- 19 Second, at least in the briefs, you
- 20 make a lot of later demographics and evidence
- 21 about what's happened. I -- I guess I'm
- 22 struggling to think why that should be relevant
- 23 in an interpretation of statutes from the last
- 24 century, especially when later demographic
- 25 evidence sometimes shows nothing more than that

- 1 states have violated Native American rights,
- 2 including Oklahoma's, for example, enforcement
- 3 of its state laws on -- on tribal lands against
- 4 tribal members in the past.
- 5 And then, third, practical
- 6 impossibility arguments, if you could address
- 7 what's wrong with what is in the brief by Robert
- 8 Henry about how states often work with tribal
- 9 entities.
- 10 And then, finally, fourth, I would
- 11 have thought that after Carpenter versus Murphy,
- 12 we might have seen a tsunami of -- of cases if
- there were a real problem here that we haven't
- 14 -- we haven't seen.
- So any of those you want to take up,
- 16 feel free.
- MR. MANSINGHANI: I'll do my best,
- 18 Justice Gorsuch.
- Why does it mean less protection?
- We're not saying it's less protection or more
- 21 protection. That is a false paradigm.
- 22 Congressional intent controls regardless. 1151
- is not a sliding scale of protection, with
- 24 reservations or dependent Indian communities
- 25 being more or less.

1 Now they did have more rights with 2 respect to the title, which is why Congress decided they needed tribal agreement, but the 3 tribe agreed to divest itself of that title. 4 5 But, when it comes to dependent Indian 6 communities, what -- what you said in Hydro Resources and what Venetie said in -- is that 7 8 dependent Indian communities, when -- when the 9 land becomes alienable, it's no longer part of 10 the dependent Indian community. And that's 11 based on the text of -- textual differences 12 between 1151(a) and 1151(b). 13 As far as what happened upon 14 statehood, we're not relying on what happened 15 100 years after statehood. We're relying upon the tribal understanding, the federal 16 understanding, and the understanding of federal 17 18 judges during the process and as the process was 19 being implemented. Federal judges at the moment of statehood transferred cases involving Indians 20 21 to tribal -- to state courts. And the tribes understood, as we prove 22 23 in our Respondent's appendix, that they would be 24 subject to state law. So what we're talking 25 about here is the original tribal understanding

- 1 and the original public meaning, and what they
- 2 are trying to do is impose a modern lawyerly
- 3 gloss on statutes enacted 100 years ago.
- 4 So, if you look at the original
- 5 understanding of how everybody implemented it,
- 6 it is completely as Oklahoma is doing today.
- 7 So the fact that there was -- there's
- 8 no tsunami, we've had 178 people already seek
- 9 relief under Murphy, even though the Murphy
- 10 mandate has been stayed and the Oklahoma Court
- of Criminal Appeals' decision is still binding
- on state courts. So that 178 cases are just the
- initial cracks in the dam, and that doesn't even
- include the state court filings that our office
- isn't -- isn't notified of. So I -- I don't
- think that you can say that there's -- there's
- 17 no tsunami coming.
- 18 And then, as far as practical things,
- 19 yes, we're going to try to work with the tribes
- 20 as much as we can regardless of how this
- 21 decision comes out. We work with the tribes on
- 22 a day-to-day basis in doing a lot of great
- 23 things in the State of Oklahoma, but that
- 24 doesn't --
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice

- 1 Kavanaugh? Justice Kavanaugh? JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Thank you, Chief 2 Justice. 3 And good morning, General. 4 I want to 5 pick up on your comment earlier that Congress 6 made clear that Indians and non-Indians were to be treated alike, and to pick up on Justice 7 8 Gorsuch's reference to demographics, and follow 9 up on what I said in my earlier guestions. 10 My understanding is that, as of 1890, 11 this was a very unusual situation because it was 12 already predominantly non-Indian in Indian territory, and that put Congress in a very 13 14 difficult position of figuring out what to do. 15 And I think that is necessary to understand to figure out what the text of these statutes mean. 16 17 So I -- I guess my question on
- demographics is people talk about the
  demographics now. The demographics in 1890 were
  also similar. How should that affect what we're
  thinking about? And, more particularly, can you
  connect that up to the text of the statutes that
  Congress enacted in that 17-year period to
- MR. MANSINGHANI: Certainly, Justice

transition to statehood?

- 1 Kavanaugh. I think that's the right way to look
- 2 at it.
- 3 By statehood, 90 percent of the area
- 4 was non-Indian. And I think what that means is
- 5 that you have to figure out what Congress was
- 6 trying to do, which is abundantly clear from the
- 7 -- from the history, which is Congress is trying
- 8 to un -- undo the tribe's exclusive ownership of
- 9 the land and exclusive governance of the land,
- 10 because there was no territorial government, to
- 11 give it to a new state that would both -- that
- would govern the land of non-Indians and Indians
- 13 alike and where -- where non-Indians and Indians
- 14 alike would -- would own the land.
- That is nothing like any of this
- 16 Court's previous cases. Mr. Gershengorn was not
- able to point to any case that was anything like
- 18 that. And so how that connects to the statutes,
- 19 well, if what Congress is trying to do, and this
- is very clear from the history, Congress was
- 21 trying to transform both the jurisdiction and
- 22 the territory -- and the land ownership. Well,
- 23 the Curtis Act transformed jurisdiction. It
- 24 said tribal law shall not be in force. And
- 25 the -- the -- the allotment agreement

- 1 transformed the land tenure.
- Now the other side says, well, we
- 3 could still levy taxes. Taxes were
- 4 affirmatively abolished in the Five Tribes Act,
- 5 so they can point to no actual tribal power that
- 6 existed. The one power they can point to was
- 7 abolished in the Five Tribes Act.
- 8 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 9 counsel.
- 10 General -- Deputy General Kneedler.
- ORAL ARGUMENT OF EDWIN S. KNEEDLER
- 12 FOR THE UNITED STATES, AS AMICUS CURIAE,
- 13 SUPPORTING THE RESPONDENT
- MR. KNEEDLER: Thank you, Mr. Chief
- 15 Justice, and may it please the Court.
- In preparing the Indian territory for
- statehood, Congress eliminated all the hallmarks
- of a reservation. Congress broke up the tribe's
- 19 national domain and extinguished the tribe's
- 20 interest in it. Congress likewise eliminated
- 21 the tribe's territorial sovereignty over that
- 22 area by abolishing tribal courts and prohibiting
- 23 enforcement of tribal law in territorial courts.
- 24 At the same time, Congress eliminated
- 25 the distinct treatment of Indians under federal

- 1 law and instead subjected all persons in the
- 2 territory, irrespective of race, to the same
- 3 courts and body of law largely incorporated from
- 4 the state law of Arkansas.
- 5 And Congress carried forward that
- 6 framework for the new state. It directed that
- 7 Oklahoma law would apply throughout the former
- 8 Indian territory and provided for the transfer
- 9 of criminal and civil cases involving Indians
- 10 and non-Indians alike to state court.
- 11 Congress did not then radically change
- 12 course and impose a -- a reservation-based
- jurisdictional regime throughout eastern
- 14 Oklahoma upon statehood.
- 15 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Mr. Kneedler,
- 16 the Creek land was owned by the tribe in
- 17 communal fee, unlike the situation on most
- 18 reservations. Could you explain the consequence
- 19 of that for the analysis in this case?
- 20 MR. KNEEDLER: Yeah, I think it's -- I
- 21 think it's significant and I think it strongly
- 22 supports disestablishment here.
- 23 The -- the tribe had fee ownership as
- 24 part of setting aside the territory for its
- 25 nation to be undisturbed, and the -- and the

- 1 treaties provided that no territory or state
- 2 would be created there.
- 3 So, after all the non-Indians moved on
- 4 to the territory, Congress concluded that was
- 5 untenable and it had to break up the Nation, and
- 6 that included both the fee and the -- and the
- 7 sovereignty.
- 8 And so what -- when Congress provided
- 9 for allotment, the tribe specifically ceded its
- 10 interest in the land, conveyed its interest in
- 11 the land to the individuals. And because the
- 12 fee was the hallmark of their sovereignty, what
- made them separate, the tribe's own conveyance
- of the fee to individual members and
- 15 extinguishment of all interest in it
- 16 extinguished their sovereignty at the same time.
- 17 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 18 counsel.
- 19 Justice Thomas?
- JUSTICE THOMAS: Yes, thank you.
- 21 Mr. Kneedler, the -- in Solem and
- 22 Parker, we had clear reservations, the -- the --
- and it was pretty standard, and then you had an
- 24 effort to dispose of or to alienate surplus
- 25 land.

Τ	Here, this is entirely different.
2	Have you seen a case like this in which we have
3	applied the Solem and Parker framework?
4	MR. KNEEDLER: I I have not. And
5	the point you made earlier that Congress in
6	all those earlier cases, the Court was really
7	trying to discern the consequence of a surplus
8	land act standing alone. Here, you have other
9	statutes that specifically address those
10	consequences.
11	Each of those cases arose in deciding
12	whether federal law would apply or state law
13	would apply. Here, Congress answered that
14	question directly. There's no need to infer
15	that from the Surplus Lands Act alone.
16	Congress, in preparation for
17	statehood, provided that the same laws would
18	apply to Indians and non-Indians and then turned
19	over a territory with those attributes to the
20	new state. And immediately upon statehood, when
21	that compact of statehood was entered into, the
22	state courts started to exercise jurisdiction
23	over over Indians in that territory, in
24	fulfillment of Congress's preparation.
25	And that was done pursuant to an act

- of Congress. It's not simply a consequence of
- 2 -- of surplus -- of surplus lands. All of that
- 3 is a consequence of Congress's preparation for
- 4 statehood.
- JUSTICE THOMAS: Thank you.
- 6 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 7 Ginsburg?
- 8 JUSTICE GINSBURG: What about
- 9 statements that an allotment conveying the title
- 10 and interest of the tribe, an allotment, unlike
- 11 cession, doesn't diminish the reservation?
- 12 MR. KNEEDLER: There's -- there's no a
- 13 priori test for that -- for that proposition.
- 14 The important point here is that when Congress
- 15 started the move towards statehood, the
- 16 preparation for statehood, it did that in the
- 17 Dawes Act in 19 -- in 1893, and that Act
- 18 provided that -- for the Dawes Commission to
- 19 negotiate for cession, for allotment, or such
- 20 other method that -- that could be accomplished
- 21 in preparation for statehood. Congress regarded
- 22 whatever method could be worked out as the
- 23 prelude to statehood.
- 24 And the reason for prelude to
- 25 statehood is because Congress was preparing to

- 1 substitute the state for a territory, just as it
- 2 has done with all territories in the past. The
- 3 only difference here was that there was no
- 4 territorial government separately established.
- 5 It was the territory's and the government's and
- 6 the tribe's, which Congress essentially
- 7 prevented from enforcing their laws and created
- 8 a situation where the land with that
- 9 characteristic could then be transferred to the
- 10 state, with Indians and non-Indians treated
- 11 alike.
- 12 JUSTICE GINSBURG: I -- I think this
- 13 question has been asked before, but, when the
- 14 tribe, not the United States, the tribe holds --
- holds title to treaty-guaranteed land, you say
- we should apply a less stringent standard for
- 17 disestablishment. Why?
- I -- I would think that you would
- 19 anticipate an even stronger showing when it is
- 20 the tribe itself, not the United States.
- 21 MR. KNEEDLER: I'm -- I'm not -- I'm
- 22 not saying it's a less standard, it's a -- it's
- 23 a less stringent standard. What I'm saying is
- that what Congress did needs to be understood in
- 25 the historical framework in -- in which it -- in

- 1 which it acted.
- 2 And the framework -- that was
- 3 understood by everybody concerned at the time of
- 4 statehood. This -- the -- the compact of
- 5 statehood that -- that provided for this, it
- 6 wasn't conferring jurisdiction on a state. It
- 7 was part of a compact under which the state came
- 8 into the union that in eastern Oklahoma, as was
- 9 prepared for by Congress, Indians and
- 10 non-Indians were treated alike.
- 11 That was the deal. And that was
- 12 followed through with by transferring cases
- involving non-Indians. And the -- the prior --
- 14 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 15 Breyer?
- JUSTICE BREYER: Thank you.
- 17 If we decide that Solem doesn't apply
- 18 here or there's an exception, then you would
- 19 win, I -- I assume. Let's assume that.
- 20 But would that not cause the same
- 21 practical problems elsewhere in the country?
- 22 For 35 years, people have lived under Solem. If
- 23 we change it or make exceptions, won't there be
- 24 places where people bring lawsuits, people who
- are in prison, and they say, we were tried in

- 1 the wrong court? The same circumstances here,
- we thought we were a tribe, and the prisoner
- 3 says, no, you're not a tribe and vice versa.
- 4 So why does the change -- why does the
- 5 parade of horribles work in only one direction?
- 6 Departing from Solem, you get the horribles
- 7 regardless.
- 8 MR. KNEEDLER: We -- we think this is
- 9 a compelling case under Solem but -- but also
- 10 that the Court has to consider the application
- of Solem with respect to the unique history of
- 12 -- of Oklahoma. There is no other territory of
- the United States converted to statehood among
- 14 the --
- 15 JUSTICE BREYER: But that isn't quite
- 16 my question. My question is: If we make an
- exception from Solem or if we change Solem, is
- there not likely to be the same kind of parade
- of horribles elsewhere? I don't know the
- 20 history of every tribe in the United States, and
- 21 though you know a great deal about it, I'm not
- 22 sure that you do.
- MR. KNEEDLER: But you created a --
- JUSTICE BREYER: And --
- MR. KNEEDLER: I'm sorry.

Τ	JUSTICE BREYER: No, go anead. You
2	see the point.
3	MR. KNEEDLER: If you created an
4	exception to Solem, it would be an exception
5	that would no doubt be based on the unique
6	circumstances of this case. Again, this and
7	unlike in Solem and other cases, there's not
8	just a Surplus Lands Act. You have these other
9	specific statutes directed at the consequences
10	of disestablishment that the the
11	attributes of disestablishment.
12	And I'm unaware, and we haven't seen
13	in the eight or nine or ten disestablishment
14	cases this Court has had, anything resembling
15	that where there are separate statutes
16	implementing
17	JUSTICE BREYER: Oh, would you know
18	what happened, say, in Alaska or in Hawaii or in
19	Wyoming? Have you all looked into this and said
20	if you create an exception and there's no one
21	else who could qualify for that exception?
22	MR. KNEEDLER: No one has identified.
23	We we we have not. Of course, in Alaska,
24	there are no no reservations at all. In
25	Wyoming, there's one reservation. So nothing

- 1 like this has surfaced.
- 2 And, again, this has been the case for
- 3 100 years in Oklahoma, more than 100 years,
- 4 since Oklahoma entered the Union on the
- 5 understanding that Indians and non-Indians would
- 6 be treated alike in the eastern half of that new
- 7 -- of that new state. There's --
- 8 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Alito?
- 9 MR. KNEEDLER: -- nothing like that --
- 10 JUSTICE ALITO: Mr. Kneedler, the
- 11 broad question whether the Creek Nation has a
- 12 reservation or whether it's a dependent Indian
- 13 community has all sorts of implications, but
- 14 what I'd like you to address is whether we can
- decide this case on a narrow ground because,
- 16 after all, the only thing that's involved here
- is a criminal prosecution.
- So, if we were to look at the narrow
- 19 question whether Congress has provided for the
- 20 trial of cases like this one in state court,
- 21 what would an opinion like that look like? What
- 22 would it look to, the 1897 Act, the 1906
- 23 Enabling Act and the amendment in 1907, the way
- these laws have been interpreted for 100 years?
- 25 What would an opinion like that --

1	MR. KNEEDLER: I think it would
2	JUSTICE ALITO: look like?
3	MR. KNEEDLER: I think it would look
4	at all those things. And, again, what happened
5	prior to statehood is highly relevant because
6	all everything Congress did was in
7	preparation for statehood. So the limit so
8	subjecting Indians and non-Indians to the same
9	laws was part of the package that Congress
LO	incorporated into the new state at statehood, so
L1	the 1897 and 1904 Acts are are critical, and
L2	the Statehood Act, which provided for the
L3	transfer of cases to state jurisdiction, was
L4	contemporaneously construed and applied by those
L5	responsible for implementing it.
L6	JUSTICE ALITO: Well, what would you
L7	say to the argument that we shouldn't look to
L8	the way it was interpreted right after statehood
L9	or for many decades after that because those
20	people were proceeding in bad faith, the
21	statutes were clear, and they and the state was
22	simply usurping authority, and the federal
23	government was going along with it?
24	MR. KNEEDLER: There's absolutely no
) E	hasis for that The these are federal

- 1 judges, federal district judges, federal Indian
- 2 court judges, and state court judges and -- and
- 3 state court prosecutors. Everybody on the
- 4 ground understood that.
- 5 There was the case in this Court
- 6 called Hendrix, which proceeded on the
- 7 assumption that an Indian in the Indian
- 8 territory had committed a crime. This case
- 9 could have been transferred to state court.
- 10 There was some special statute that said
- otherwise, but the premise of the whole case was
- that his case would have otherwise gone to state
- 13 court in Oklahoma.
- 14 And the -- it's important to
- 15 understand that the tribe understood that. And
- 16 I urge the Court to look at the statements by
- 17 the principal chief of the -- of the Creek
- 18 Nation in 1906, after the -- the Five Tribes Act
- 19 was passed, and he said: Upon the establishment
- of a state government, all powers over the
- 21 governing, even of our landed property, will
- 22 cease, except insofar as the distribution of our
- 23 property and money is concerned, which will be
- 24 entirely under --
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice --

1 Justice Sotomayor? 2 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Mr. Kneedler, I understood that statement was in light of the 3 existing congressional disestablishment 4 5 legislation that Congress subsequently changed 6 and didn't go through with. But putting that aside, I -- I haven't figured out whether you've 7 8 accepted the -- Oklahoma's suggestion about the 9 dependent Indian community exception or 10 argument. 11 Are you endorsing that argument? 12 MR. KNEEDLER: No. Not -- not -- not 13 in terms, we're not. I mean, this Court has --14 has discussed dependent Indian community 15 separately. But some of what informs the 16 State's argument we think is very important, as I said before, that the -- the State --17 18 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: But 19 disestablishment -- but let's go back to, is 20 there a consequence that we're unaware of? If 21 we were to describe this reservation -- this 22 Creek land as dependent Indian community --23 MR. KNEEDLER: I --24 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- what other 25 things would we put in question, what -- what --

Τ	MR. KNEEDLER: I			
2	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: You're saying the			
3	things that inform that discussion inform your			
4	disestablishment and I understand your			
5	argument, but why aren't you endorsing the			
6	dependent Indian community argument?			
7	MR. KNEEDLER: Well, there could be			
8	other situations. I mean, for example, in in			
9	Oklahoma, Congress has provided for various			
10	statutes to apply to tribes within their former			
11	reservations. And if these were regarded as			
12	dependent Indian communities, would statutes			
13	like that apply? Now Congress still referred to			
14	them as former reservations.			
15	But one one point that I think is			
16	that makes this			
17	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Mr. Kneedler, I			
18	hate to cut you off, but I do have one last			
19	question here.			
20	MR. KNEEDLER: Sure.			
21	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Which is what do			
22	we do with if we say this reservation was			
23	disestablished, under what theory would we			
24	recognize Indian sovereignty over lands they			
25	kept? It was either disestablished or not.			

1	And why
2	MR. KNEEDLER: Well
3	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: would all the
4	complex laws that exist now giving the Indians
5	the reservation the casino rights and
6	jurisdiction over lands that they own and and
7	all of those other things, what would be the
8	basis of keeping all of that
9	MR. KNEEDLER: Well, it would be
10	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: if we held it
11	was disenfranchised?
12	MR. KNEEDLER: It's commonplace that
13	when a reservation is disestablished, those
14	parcels that remain in as allotments or
15	tribal trust land or or of the sort remain
16	Indian Country.
17	And so saying the reservation was
18	disestablished, which has been the assumption
19	for over 100 years, would not change anything or
20	the ground because the and and Oklahoma
21	has always been understood where allotment
22	allotments are the fulcrum of tribal and
23	individual activities. And this
24	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
25	Mr. Kneedler.

Τ	Justice Kagan?
2	JUSTICE KAGAN: Mr. Kneedler, I
3	understand you want to support Oklahoma's
4	position in this case, but just to follow up on
5	Justice Sotomayor's questions about what Indian
6	what dependent Indian communities were or
7	were thought to be in 1935, do you think that
8	those concepts were mutually exclusive, a
9	reservation and a dependent Indian community?
10	MR. KNEEDLER: No, I think there was a
11	lot of overlap and that, you know, sort of the
12	bottom Congress the Court often described
13	them in general terms as land validly set apart
14	for the use of Indians as such under the
15	superintendence of the government. And that
16	that phrase appeared in in Potawatomie in
17	describing is there a difference between trusts
18	and and reservations.
19	So that the same general concept was
20	there, except for a reservation, as opposed to
21	an allotment, for example, it's it's owned
22	collectively. And so, when the land is broken
23	up, as it was here, particularly when it's
24	broken when it's fee land that is broken up
25	and when someone conveys their interest in fee

- 1 to -- to somebody else, they are conveying all
- of their interest in it. It's not like trust
- 3 property on the typical reservation where the --
- 4 where, when it's allotted, the United States
- 5 retains an interest and, therefore, on behalf of
- 6 the tribe in some sense, retains an interest.
- When it's fee land, it is conveyed out
- 8 of the tribe and the tribe loses all of its
- 9 interest in the land. And that's particularly
- 10 clear under this allotment agreement because it
- 11 provides that the United States also
- 12 extinguished -- by approving the deeds,
- 13 extinguished its interest in the land. And that
- interest was a reversionary interest for when
- 15 the tribe was disappearing.
- 16 And so, by -- by relinquishing the
- 17 United States' interest in that land at the same
- 18 time it was conveyed to the individual allottee,
- 19 it made it clear that the tribe as sovereign was
- 20 being -- its sovereign authority over that land
- 21 was being eliminated.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Thank you,
- 23 Mr. Kneedler.
- 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 25 Gorsuch?

1	JUSTICE GORSUCH: Mr. Kneedler, tell
2	me what's wrong with this sequence of of
3	of of my understanding, that Congress did
4	establish something it called a reservation with
5	respect to this property at some point in time,
6	that through the 1890s and the early part of the
7	last century, there was an awful lot of debate
8	about how to how to end that reservation,
9	whether they could end it in anticipation of
LO	Oklahoma becoming part of the Union.
L1	And that things got very complicated
L2	and they came mighty close to ending the
L3	reservation but never quite passed the kind of
L4	language that we typically see when that
L5	happens, reversion of all lands to the public
L6	domain or cessation or anything like that.
L7	In fact, the Dawes Commission
L8	couldn't admitted it couldn't quite get
L9	there. And so you're really left to rely mostly
20	on a lot of demographic evidence, both then and
21	now, which, while not everybody's acting in good
22	faith, not everybody not everybody's acting
23	in bad faith too, as someone pointed out.
24	And it's a mixed bag. And it's very
25	hard to make much of it. And to rely too

- 1 heavily on demographic evidence is dangerous
- 2 because you in some -- in some ways incentivize
- 3 people to ignore the plain terms of the law.
- 4 And, for example, as I pointed out
- 5 earlier, I think it was until the 1970s that
- 6 Oklahoma continued to try and enforce state law
- 7 against Native Americans on allotted territory.
- 8 I believe I have that right.
- 9 So tell me what's wrong with that
- 10 understanding, please.
- 11 MR. KNEEDLER: Well, first of all, I
- think there's a big difference between
- demographics before and after statehood. The --
- the overwhelming presence of non-Indians in the
- 15 territory was precisely the reason why Congress
- said it won't work to have tribal governments
- 17 running this and tribes couldn't emphasize
- 18 jurisdiction over the non-Indians.
- 19 And what Congress said is, this area
- 20 needs a government for and by both Indians and
- 21 non-Indians, and it established that in the
- 22 territory so that it could hand that arrangement
- 23 over to the new state.
- 24 And it was contest -- this Court's
- decisions say that the contemporaneous

- 1 understanding of what Congress was doing is
- 2 significant. The original public meaning of
- 3 what -- what was done, and everybody, the state
- 4 understood it, the state -- or the -- the state
- 5 obviously implemented its compact of statehood,
- 6 the federal government understood it. Delix
- 7 Cohen understood it. The Commissioner of Indian
- 8 Affairs at the time said there's only a shell of
- 9 the government -- of the tribal government left.
- 10 The tribal chairman -- the tribal chief said the
- 11 same thing, that all we are in a position to do
- is distribute the property.
- 13 And that -- that is -- and even the
- 14 case that Petitioners and -- and the tribe rely
- 15 upon, the Harjo versus Kleppe, specifically says
- that the tribe lost its territorial sovereignty
- 17 even though it had the authority to run its
- 18 internal affairs. So --
- 19 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 20 Kavanaugh?
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Thank you, Chief
- 22 Justice.
- 23 And good morning, Mr. Kneedler.
- MR. KNEEDLER: Good morning.
- 25 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I want to follow

- 1 up on a question Justice Sotomayor asked and one
- 2 Justice Gorsuch asked.
- 3 Justice Sotomayor mentioned quite
- 4 rightly the 1832 and 1833 treaties. My
- 5 understanding, however, was that the 1866 treaty
- 6 made clear that those treaty rights were, I
- 7 don't know if the word is superseded, but
- 8 diminished because the tribes had aligned and
- 9 made a treaty with the confederates --
- 10 Confederate States of America, and the treaty
- 11 language in 1866 said that that had unsettled
- 12 the treaty relations.
- 13 Anything you want to add on the 1866
- 14 treaty, the relevance of that?
- 15 MR. KNEEDLER: Yeah, I -- I don't
- think it adds significantly to the point, except
- 17 that it -- it reflected an assertion of a
- 18 greater federal responsibility in the territory.
- 19 And it was contemplated that Congress could pass
- 20 laws governing the territory.
- I did want to make one point about
- 22 practical consequences on the criminal side.
- Not only would -- would this jeopardize all the
- 24 prior convictions on the state side, but it
- 25 would impose great burdens on the federal

- 1 government. It's estimated a 1300 percent
- 2 increase in criminal prosecutions brought in
- 3 state court.
- 4 And then, of course, for the state,
- 5 there -- there would be questions of taxation
- 6 and whatnot. And -- and I don't think City of
- 7 Sherrill, which has been suggested, is a
- 8 solution to that.
- 9 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Can I ask one
- 10 other question, Mr. Kneedler, to follow up on
- 11 Justice Gorsuch.
- 12 My understanding given the
- demographics as of 1890 was that it would be
- very hard to have a tribal government over the
- 15 whole territory because of the population at the
- 16 time.
- 17 And my question is: What tribal
- 18 authority, judicial authority, or legislative
- 19 authority to your knowledge was exercised over
- 20 the whole territory, including the white
- 21 settlers, in 1890 through 1907?
- 22 MR. KNEEDLER: It -- it was that the
- tribes had no authority over the white settlers,
- 24 which is why Congress put in place the -- the
- 25 courts for the Indian territory and it put in

- 1 place federal law, mostly incorporating Arkansas
- 2 law, to govern Indians and non-Indians alike.
- 3 And that is the regime that Congress
- 4 passed on from the territory to the new state
- 5 and the new state received and has been
- 6 faithfully applying that ever since statehood.
- 7 And --
- 8 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, Mr.
- 9 Kneedler.
- 10 Mr. Gershengorn, you have two minutes
- 11 for rebuttal.
- 12 REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF IAN H. GERSHENGORN
- 13 ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER
- 14 MR. GERSHENGORN: Thank you, Mr. Chief
- 15 Justice. A number of things.
- Justice Gorsuch, first, you're exactly
- 17 right. This Court may not be able to determine
- which party had the better reading of events on
- 19 the ground 120 years ago, but it is surely
- 20 well-positioned to determine which party has a
- 21 better reading of the text. And on that score,
- 22 I submit this case is not close.
- 23 Second, Justice Ginsburg, two points.
- 24 With respect to fee title, that was meant to be
- an additional protection because everyone

- 1 understood the -- the imperfections in Indian
- 2 title. The Creek didn't even get their patent
- 3 until 1852, 20 years after the reservation was
- 4 -- was given. Elimination of fee title does not
- 5 eliminate treaty promises. Those have to be
- 6 disestablished through plain text.
- 7 In addition, Justice Ginsburg, you're
- 8 exactly right, the right, title, and interest
- 9 language, which is the only text the other side
- 10 can point to, conveys only proprietary interest,
- 11 not sovereign interest, and so there is no
- 12 textual transfer.
- 13 There has been a lot of talk --
- 14 discussion this morning about irrespective of
- 15 race. It is -- one quick point on that.
- When Congress -- when -- in the
- 17 Enabling Act in Section 13, what Congress put in
- 18 place was the laws of the territory of Oklahoma,
- 19 which did not have the supposedly magic language
- 20 about "irrespective of race." That suggests
- 21 that Congress well understood that the arguments
- the SG and Oklahoma are making on this score are
- 23 -- are made up for today.
- 24 Fourth, there was a lot of discussion
- 25 about whether there's a compromise available on

1	criminal jurisdiction. There is not. Justice
2	Alito listed a number of factors for Mr.
3	Kneedler. One of the missing ones was the text.
4	The text is very clear. I was amazed
5	that Mr. Kneedler said there was no basis for
6	believing that there was ignoring the text.
7	Nagonset said that is true. Secretary Udall's
8	memo listed seven states in which it were true.
9	Finally, the numbers today are
10	mind-boggling in the back of the envelope. They
11	don't appear in any of the briefs. The only
12	fixed number is 178 petitions. That dwarfs
13	Ramos.
14	I understand the Court's concerns
15	about jurisdictional consequences, but there are
16	no serious disagreements that these disputes are
17	common in Indian Country
18	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
19	counsel. The case is submitted.
20	(Whereupon, at 11:32 a.m., the case
21	was submitted.)
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