

Though the Heavens May Fall



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"Brings to brilliant life the great case that started the downfall of slavery on both sides of the Atlantic." -Anthony Lewis, author of Gideon's Trumpet The case of James Somerset, an escaped slave, in June of 1772 in London's Westminster Hall was a decisive turning point in human history. Steven Wise has uncovered fascinating new revelations in this case, which statesmen of the time threatened would bring the economy of the British Empire to a crashing halt. In a gripping, hour-by-hour narrative of the trial and the inflamed participants, Wise leads the reader to the extraordinary and unexpected decision by the great conservative judge, Lord Mansfield, which led to the United States' own abolition movement. As the case drew to a close, and defenders of slavery pleaded with him to maintain the system, Mansfield's reply has resounded down through more than two centuries: "Let Justice be done, though the Heavens may fall." "Wise has an eye for evocative detail and an interest in the trappings and procedures of an 18th-century courtroom that do as much to engage the reader as the drama of the trials themselves. And he has a good lawyer's love of those moments in which the true poetry of humane justice finds its voice." - New York Times Book Review

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