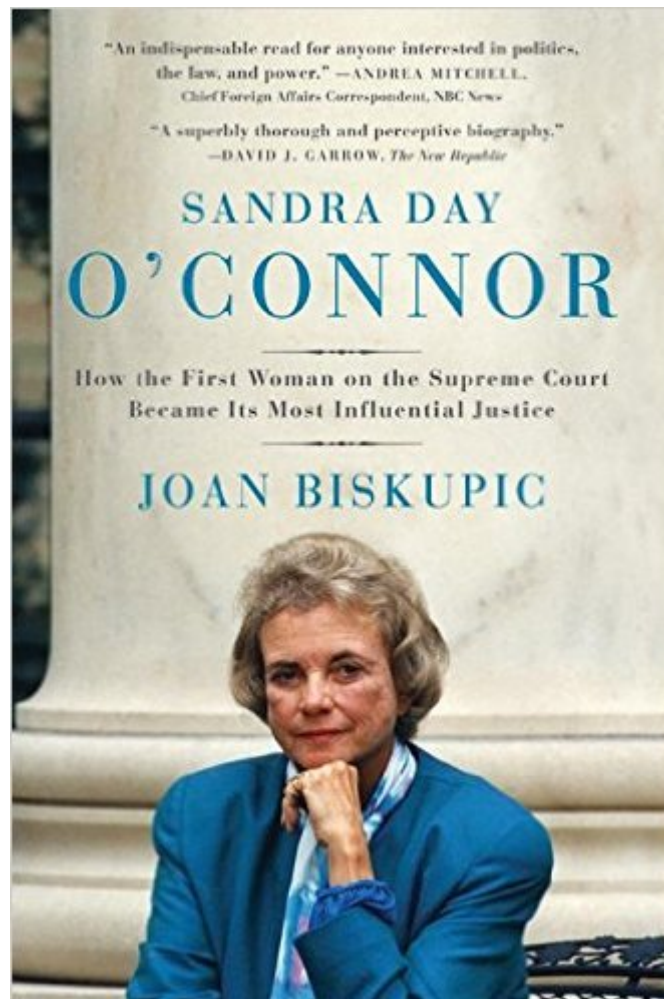


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Sandra Day O'Connor: How The First Woman On The Supreme Court Became Its Most Influential Justice



Synopsis

Sandra Day O'Connor, America's first woman justice, was called the most powerful woman in America. She became the axis on which the Supreme Court turned, and it was often said that to gauge the direction of American law, one need look only to O'Connor's vote. Drawing on information gleaned from once-private papers, hundreds of interviews, and the insight gained from nearly two decades of covering the Supreme Court, author Joan Biskupic offers readers a fascinating portrait of a complex and multifaceted woman—a lawyer, politician, legislator, and justice, as well as wife, mother, A-list society hostess, and competitive athlete. Biskupic provides an in-depth account of her transformation from tentative jurist to confident architect of American law.

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Customer Reviews

One measure of a solid judicial biography is how complete a picture it fills out of the justice as a person. By this, and other measures, Joan Biskupic has contributed an important study of the Justice just at the point when it is most helpful—her perhaps extended "retirement" from the Court. Biskupic is the former Supreme Court reporter for the Washington Post and, more recently, USA Today. Her long time vantage point observing the Court extends at least back to the early 1990's, and this rich perspective strengthens the book. The initial four chapters sketch out in appropriate detail O'Connor's personal and professional history. Biskupic particularly well interweaves personal developments with O'Connor's deep involvement in Republican politics (close ties to Goldwater; co-state chair for Nixon in 1972), service in the Arizona legislature, and her period as a Superior

Court and appellate judge in the state system. Also, her early and close personal ties with William Rehnquist during this pre-Court Arizona period are well discussed. Strange as it may seem, her legislative record suggested sympathy for abortion rights, and this would cause her later problems during her confirmation, even though she lost interest in passing the ERA. These initial chapters give the reader a pretty solid grasp on O'Connor as a person, her values and ambitions, her competitive nature, and political skills (such as cultivating a friendship with Warren Burger) during this period. The next several chapters are of particular interest given recent developments at the Court. The confirmation process was smooth, except for allegations by an Arizona national abortion opponent (and neighbor of O'Connor) that she was in favor of abortion.

Joan Biskupic's biography *Sandra Day O'Connor: How the First Woman on the Supreme Court Became Its Most Influential Justice* provides a compelling picture of the first woman Supreme Court justice and of the inner workings of the Supreme Court through four presidential administrations. Biskupic combines assiduous research with a writing style that makes the intricacies of Supreme Court proceedings accessible and fascinating. The biography is impressive on many counts, especially in how it captures O'Connor's skillful handling of the challenges of being the nation's first female Supreme Court Justice. Throughout, Biskupic's stance is balanced, outlining the strengths of O'Connor's jurisprudence while acknowledging O'Connor's critics. While the main focus of the biography is on O'Connor's work in the Supreme Court, the early chapters offer a snapshot of O'Connor as a driven career woman, a devoted wife and mother, and an adroit politician. Biskupic shows how O'Connor's life on the family's "Lazy B." farm in Arizona was a formative influence, even though her parents consciously separated her from the farm in order to give her more educational opportunities at a private school in El Paso. Her father's independence and opposition to the expansion of federal powers in Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal, and O'Connor's experiences as a trial lawyer, an Arizona state senator, and a judge on the Arizona Court of Appeals shaped an approach to law based on pragmatic, narrow definitions as opposed to overarching theoretical positions in rulings. As Biskupic shows, O'Connor's Arizonan, Western roots are manifest in her respect for the Tenth Amendment, which gives to states those powers not directly assigned to the federal government.

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