



# **An Improbable Life: My Sixty Years at Columbia and Other Adventures**

*Michael I. Sovern*

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Columbia University began the second half of the twentieth century in decline, bottoming out with the student riots of 1968. Yet by the close of the century, the institution had regained its stature as one of the greatest universities in the world.

According to the New York Times, "If any one person is responsible for Columbia's recovery, it is surely Michael Sovern." In this memoir, Sovern, who served as the university's president from 1980 to 1993, recounts his sixty-year involvement with the institution, as well as his experiences growing up poor in the South Bronx and attending Columbia. Sovern addresses key debates in academia, such as how to make college available to all, whether affirmative action is fair, whether great researchers are paid too much and valuable teachers too little, what are the strengths and weaknesses of lifetime tenure, and what is the government's responsibility for funding universities. A labor-law specialist, Sovern also discusses his personal and professional accomplishments off campus, particularly his work to compensate victims of racial exploitation and his recommendations as chairman of the Commission on Integrity in Government.

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