



# John Paul Stevens: An Independent Life

*Bill Barnhart, Gene Schlickman*

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During Justice Sonya Sotomayor's recent confirmation hearings, the idea of "biography" played a high-profile role in the debate. How much does a person's experience affect his or her judicial opinions? Should personal history be a key consideration when determining qualifications to sit on the highest court in the land? In this impeccably researched book, journalist Bill Barnhart and retired lawyer and former legislator Gene Schlickman paint a detailed portrait of Justice John Paul Stevens's remarkable life and tenure on the Court. Through vivid family history and a careful look at his work on the bench, Barnhart and Schlickman offer the first biography of the second longest serving Supreme Court justice of the modern era—one who has proudly earned the title of the Court's most prolific dissenter.

To provide a nuanced and multifaceted look at the justice, Barnhart and Schlickman interviewed Stevens and an extraordinary number of Stevens's friends and family members, former clerks, current colleagues, politicians, and court watchers. They spoke with such public figures as former President Ford, former Ford chief of staff Donald Rumsfeld, and Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Interviews with Stevens's children and one of his brothers provide personal insights into the man behind the robe. Tales of his childhood, of growing up in an affluent family in Chicago's Hyde Park neighborhood, and of the family business, including The Stevens Hotel (now the Chicago Hilton and Towers), create a rich portrait of the independent man and judge. Intimate anecdotes from Stevens's former law clerks reveal the lighter side of some of the most serious work in the country.

Barnhart and Schlickman also give careful consideration to Stevens's career. They trace his early years as a Chicago lawyer, his appointment to the federal appeals bench in Chicago, and his ultimate nomination to the Supreme Court by Republican President Ford. They examine his best-known opinions, including his emotional dissents in *Texas v. Johnson* and *Bush v. Gore*. They trace his growth as a molder of Court decisions. In an era of an increasingly politicized judiciary, the story of Stevens's life, as a lawyer who joined the bench with no political or ideological baggage, is an urgent reminder of the importance of judicial impartiality and the need to cultivate it. This vibrant biography will be of interest to those fascinated by the inner workings of the Supreme Court as well as those who simply want to learn more about one of Chicago's favorite sons.

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