



Five Chiefs: A Supreme Court Memoir

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When he resigned last June, Justice Stevens was the third longest serving Justice in American history (1975-2010)--only Justice William O. Douglas, whom Stevens succeeded, and Stephen Field have served on the Court for a longer time.

In *Five Chiefs*, Justice Stevens captures the inner workings of the Supreme Court via his personal experiences with the five Chief Justices--Fred Vinson, Earl Warren, Warren Burger, William Rehnquist, and John Roberts--that he interacted with. He reminisces of being a law clerk during Vinson's tenure; a practicing lawyer for Warren; a circuit judge and junior justice for Burger; a contemporary colleague of Rehnquist; and a colleague of current Chief Justice John Roberts. Along the way, he will discuss his views of some the most significant cases that have been decided by the Court from Vinson, who became Chief Justice in 1946 when Truman was President, to Roberts, who became Chief Justice in 2005.

Packed with interesting anecdotes and stories about the Court, *Five Chiefs* is an unprecedented and historically significant look at the highest court in the United States.

Five Chiefs: A Supreme Court Memoir Details

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From Reader Review Five Chiefs: A Supreme Court Memoir for online ebook

Vanessa says

Ehhhhhhh. Even in the realm of reading something as an homage to a jurist I very much admire, this was kind of a snooze. I still love you, Justice Stevens! I wore a bow-tie for your birthday! But your book is not that good.

Pamela Okano says

Chatty legal memoir by Justice Stephens about the five Chief Justices with whom he had dealings. Occasionally the discussion gets into obtuse principles of constitutional law. But there are other attractions to this book: for example, who knew that there are spittoons behind the US Supreme Court bench? Or that Justices Stephens and Breyer agreed that the Bush Campaign's application to stay the Florida recount was so frivolous that the Court would never grant it? Justice Stephens manages to roundly criticize some of the decisions by some in the conservative wing of the Court without resorting to name calling. And he didn't especially like Chief Justice Rehnquist's gold stripes, but confirms what other justices have said: that Rehnquist was a very efficient Chief Justice who was fair to all wings of the Court. A good read for lawyers and laypersons interested in the workings of the Court.

Jim Talbott says

I gave this book a much better rating than most other readers, so I feel like I should explain why. 1. I'm a total Supreme Court gossip junky, and this has lots of little details about the justices and their spouses. 2. People want this book to be like Toobin's "The Nine," but I like that when you're reading Stevens, you know he's making himself look good because he wrote it. Whereas in Toobin's book, the people who agreed to divulge dirt on other justices got to look good, but you really had to read between the lines to figure that out. 3. Stevens goes out of his way to describe an ideal of jurisprudence in which concern for the institution of law, which includes justices being constrained by stare decisis, overrides personal ideology and a vision of the court in which collegiality continues in the face of deep ideological differences. He quite clearly understands that certain aspects of the court provide a type of theater that is meant to strengthen our faith in our legal institutions. Though that faith may appear quaint in this era of people on the right and left having lost faith in our public institutions, I strongly agree with Justice Stevens that it is a faith worth aspiring to and fortifying.

Laura says

Good book. Not a law professor's book; not even the sort of law professor's book that's written for a lay audience. Nor does it get deep into the weeds the way Edward Lazarus's Closed Chambers did. Instead, it was like a casual conversation with someone who was deeply involved in writing the world we live in.

It's mostly conversational, but emotion does bubble up. On the retirement of Justice Thurgood Marshall, who he clearly had great respect for:

“Thurgood’s retirement may well have been the most significant judicial event of Bill Rehnquist’s tenure as chief justice. When I reflect on its importance, I think first about my memories of his contributions to our conferences and his personal friendship, and second about the changes in the Court’s jurisprudence that are attributable to his successor, Clarence Thomas.” (186) . . . “The importance of the change in the Court’s jurisprudence that is directly attributable to the choice of Clarence Thomas to fill the vacancy created by Thurgood’s retirement cannot be overstated. . . . [D]ecisions made by five-to-four votes in which Clarence was a member of the majority are evidence of that importance because I am convinced that Thurgood would have voted with the four dissenters in most, if not all, of them While Thurgood’s jurisprudence reflected an understanding that the Constitution was drafted ‘to form a more perfect Union’ – and thus to accommodate unforeseen changes in society – Justice Thomas’s repeated emphasis on historical analysis seems to assume that we should view the Union as perfect in the beginning and subject to improvement only by following the cumbersome process of amending the Constitution. Three five-to-four decisions in which Clarence provided the critical vote to invalidate federal gun control laws illustrate the point.” (187-88)

Which is a wonderful articulation of how the judge’s understanding of the constitution impacts the bottom line decision. Is it an instrument of the ongoing Enlightenment, or was it ghost written by the divine or invisible hand? I know what I believe, or at least, which tentative hypothesis I’m operating under. But I can’t say I’m without sympathy for the pragmatic view that giving judges the ability to announce what the Constitution really means amounts to an enormous delegation of power to those wearing the black robes. It’s all a rich tapestry. Movin’ on.

We spent weeks on Seminole Tribe in Federal Courts once upon a time. That’s the case where the court, via Chief Justice Rehnquist, found states had a type of constitutional sovereign immunity implicit in the Eleventh Amendment. The Eleventh Amendment says “The Judicial power of the United States shall not be construed to extend to any suit in law or equity, commenced or prosecuted against one of the United States by Citizens of another State, or by Citizens or Subjects of any Foreign State.” The conservative majority of the court found this prevented the Seminole Tribe of Florida from suing the State of Florida for violation of its federal statutory rights. My eyes glaze over trying to remember the court’s reasoning now (amazing how rarely people ask state courts to figure out such things). Stevens is comparatively scathing in his condemnation of the chief’s reasoning, observing ““Depriving a state of the mysterious right to protect its dignity from its own citizens is equally necessary to protect the federal rights of those citizens.” (196). Which, if you know the embarrassing history of the 14th Amendment in federal courts during Reconstruction, is a devastating critique. Stevens is almost Hitchens-esque in his final observation on Seminole Tribe: “Like the gold stripes on his robes, Chief Justice Rehnquist’s writing about sovereignty was ostentatious and more reflective of the ancient British monarchy than our modern republic. I am hopeful that his writings in this area will not be long remembered.” (197).

In the USSC, when the chief is in the dissent, the senior judge in the majority makes the writing assignment. Stevens is dead on when he observed that “I do think I hit the nail on the head in at least three important cases (*Blakely v. Washington*, *Romer v. Evans*, and *Grutter v. Bollinger*) in which the chief was in the dissent. Despite vigorous dissent in each, these three excellent opinions will, I am confident, pass the test of time with flying colors.” (238) “Justice Kennedy’s opinion for the court in *Romer v. Evans* (1996) . . . sounded the death knell to *Bowers v. Hardwick*, the 1986 cases holding that the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment did not forbid Georgia from making it a crime for same-sex couples to engage in conduct that was assumed to be lawful for heterosexuals. By making mere animus toward a group an inadequate rationale for a discriminatory law under the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, *Romer* suggested that a criminal prohibition of homosexual sodomy would likely be struck

down if challenged on equal protection grounds. Seven years later, in *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003), Justice O'Connor took this position." (239-40). I can't say I have never cursed Blakely and wished the court hadn't just admitted it made a mistake, or at least, suffered a failure of imagination, when it said that legislatures could simply declare what was an element, what was a sentencing factor, but I cannot quarrel with its bottom line. The State should prove its case to a jury beyond a reasonable doubt, not persuade a judge on a preponderance standard. That works for me. Which they'd pointed that out A LITTLE EARLIER.

He also alludes to *Parents Involved*, a case I spent no little time on once upon a time. And because of him, I know that President Ford and I have more similar feelings than I realized.

A good book. Glad I read it. It won't be on my shelf next to Cardozo's *The Nature of the Judicial Process*, metaphorically, but it was still fascinating to see this sort of exploration of how the court operates.

Geoff Stone's review is spot on. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/geoffre...> I'm not sure I have the same edition Good Reads had since the page count is off.

Drew says

When I first heard that John Paul Stevens was writing a memoir that covered his life's intersection with the Supreme Court of the United States, I was very excited. He was one of my favorite justices, due to his somewhat liberal bent. Liberal in that the rest of the Court had moved so far to the right that a moderate conservative is now seen as a "liberal".

What a fantastic book. Stevens gives insight into his judicial philosophy and what has transpired during the tenures of the last five Chief Justices. He briefly touches on the twelve Chiefs who preceded his time with the Court. Interestingly, his five greatest Chiefs all were before he became acquainted with the Court. They were John Jay (1st Chief), John Marshall (4th and his favorite), William Howard Taft, Charles Evans Hughes and Harlan F. Stone.

Stevens also gives a rare insider view of the mechanics of the Court, regarding personal interactions, filing systems, discussions and some non-judicial activities. For anyone interested in important cases that concern our Constitution or jurisprudence since our Founding as a nation, you really want to read this book. I'd really hate to give away the cool things he tells us about the more mundane things that happen behind closed doors, but suffice it to say, working at Joe's Bar is never a dull day!

The five Chiefs he covers are Fred Vinson, Earl Warren, Warren Burger, William Rehnquist and John Roberts, Jr. Stevens was a clerk to Justice Wiley Rutledge during Vinson's term as Chief. He was a private attorney during Warren's term and then a justice during the remaining three Chiefs time at the Court. He seems to have the most distaste for Rehnquist (as do I) as far as his approach to liberty, the death penalty, states rights and his personal arrogance (e.g. decorating the Chiefs robes differently than the other justices on the Court).

My greatest distaste with the book is not in what it covers but in Stevens takes on judicial pay. He claims that judges, especially at the federal level, aren't paid enough. I've heard this argument and thought it convincing when I've read it in other places. Stevens, however, really destroys its veracity for me. He says that he had to sell his summer home, that he flew to on the plane he owned, because he couldn't afford it as a judge. His friend on the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals also had to sell his second home when he was

appointed. Excuse me but WTF! Stevens and his ilk must have no comprehension of fairness if they believe owning multiple homes and private planes is something their salary should cover when the great masses of this country don't have their own homes or much money.

Overall, this book was an excellent read by a mostly excellent justice. His thoughts on the death penalty, states rights and how the Constitution is a living document are worth the price of admission. As he says near the end, history "provides an insufficient guide to the meaning of our Constitution." Justice John Paul's Stevens memoir of his time interacting with the Court is part history, part analysis and part "user's guide" to our Nation.

Bonnie says

John Paul Stevens has a unique perspective of the Supreme Court and its chief justices - he served on the Supreme Court for the third-longest term in American History. Along the way, he worked with and got to know five chief justices: Fred Vinson, Earl Warren, Warren Burger, William Rehnquist and John Roberts. In this book, he discusses some of their most important decisions and how they came about. The author also does a review of the other chief justices through the years. This book would be an important read for a scholar of the Supreme Court, and is also an interesting read for the rest of us.

Sarah says

It's telling that after serving on the bench for 35 years and retiring at 90, Justice Stevens publishes a Supreme Court memoir mostly about five other guys. Stevens does take the opportunity to disagree, a lot. But he remains constructive in his disagreement, which is an achievement considering how crucial the issues are (the death penalty, campaign finance and gun control). His criticism is unequivocal but he still doesn't harp on Citizens United (though he does refer us to his 90-page dissent). His treatment of Bush v. Gore is extremely pragmatic: he tells us that voting to deny the stay (which would have instituted the Florida recount) was a no-brainer, but as nothing more can be done about it, he declines to comment on the end result. Not even a glib aside, because Justice Stevens is too awesome for that. He saves his real energy for the Eleventh Amendment and sovereign immunity, which apparently really rile him up. Who knew?

I wish he had spoken about his Fourth Amendment jurisprudence (he authored *Gant* and never even mentions it!) but then, his focus is never on himself and primarily on what he feels must change. I'm almost (but not really) glad he retired before the Court decided *Maryland v. King*, the DNA collection case; he mentions being impacted by DNA evidence exonerating death row inmates, and if he had voted with the majority in *King*, I might have cried.

Reading this satisfied the law itch I didn't know I had. Now if I had only realized I could read books about the law instead of actually practicing it, where would I be?? Though I definitely geeked out when Justice Stevens refers to his "most frequently cited opinion." It's just super exciting to be one of the hundreds of thousands of lawyers who have cited it.

Trivia I learned: Justice Stevens' appointment to the Court was opposed by the National Organization of Women!

Cicely says

Rambly schmably. I guess the description had me hoping for a slightly different kind of book - if it had been called "random thoughts on my awesome life and the people I ran into" by Justice John Paul Stevens, I was totally there. I thought there would be more about the transitions in the court from Chief to Chief, which I felt was lacking, except in a really superficial way, when Stevens seemed to remember that that is what his memoir was supposed to be detailing - accomplished with random, non-segued stuff about each chief's administrative capabilities. I had to give it three stars, because Justices of any kind give me the chills (read: they can say whatever they want, and I love them), and because I thought the historical anecdotes were delightful. I don't think I would have enjoyed the book nearly as much if I wasn't a lawyer (hahahhaa, I actually get to call myself a lawyer!) and hadn't read all of the cases that he cites. If I had to encourage a rewrite I would say TIGHTEN YOUR SHIP. But honest to god, when you're 90 years old, readers have to cut you some slack, right? Okay, that's enough.

Riley says

I enjoyed this memoir by Justice John Paul Stevens, though it suffers from an ailment that books by longtime public figures often have: it comes across in many places as too diplomatic and too unwilling to criticize.

That said, I found Stevens' perspective on Warren Burger the most interesting, since Burger has long been an object of ridicule, perhaps in part because of Bob Woodward's less-than-stellar portrait of him in "The Brethren."

It is clear that Stevens, by contrast, believes that Burger was a very good and underappreciated chief justice. Probably the only justice that Stevens has nothing good to say about is Clarence Thomas, the conservative replacement to civil rights icon Thurgood Marshall. As Stevens notes:

"The importance of the change in the Court's jurisprudence that is directly attributable to the choice of Clarence Thomas to fill the vacancy created by Thurgood's retirement cannot be overstated. ... [D]ecisions made by five-to-four votes in which Clarence was a member of the majority are evidence of that importance because I am convinced that Thurgood would have voted with the four dissenters in most, if not all, of them. While Thurgood's jurisprudence reflected an understanding that the Constitution was drafted 'to form a more perfect Union' -- and thus to accommodate unforeseen changes in society -- Justice Thomas's repeated emphasis on historical analysis seems to assume that we should view the Union as perfect from the beginning and subject to improvement only by following the cumbersome process of amending the Constitution."

Andy Miller says

An interesting perspective by Justice Stevens on his time on the court; the focus on the Five Chief Justices that he knew including the three that he served with on his time of the court. There is some irony on this focus in that after leaving aside the administrative parts of the job, a theme of Stevens is that the Chief

Justice is just one of nine in deciding the major legal issues facing our country.

While the book includes discussion of the legal issues and the perspective of Stevens on the major cases decided during his tenure including the origin and benefits of each Justice shaking every other Justice's hand before oral argument, the physical layout of the Court including the proximity of the lawyers to the Justices in oral argument, and the role of clerks and staff and description of the conferences and circulation of opinions.

What struck me the most is that Justice Stevens did not shy away from stating his disagreements with his fellow Justices during his tenure and why he believed that they came to wrong decisions and the negative consequences but that he described those disagreements with such grace and class and genuine affection for the Justices with whom he disagreed

Michael Kramer says

The book focuses on the five Chief Justices that Justice Stevens had met, but also provides a short bio on all Chief Justices of the United States. The book gives a nice, behind the scenes look at the Supreme Court.

Lorna says

Five Chiefs: A Supreme Court Memoir was a delightful look at the musings and experiences of one of the longest-serving associate supreme court justices from the time of his appointment by President Gerald Ford in 1975 to the time of his retirement in 2010. Justice Stevens shares how as a young law student in 1945, he was so taken with the experiences that a beloved constitutional law professor, Nathaniel Nathanson, shared of many of the supreme court justices and landmark decisions he had witnessed. It is in this vein, that Justice Stevens imparts to us his experiences over the years with Chief Justices Fred Vinson and Earl Warren as well as his experiences in serving with Supreme Court Chief Justices Warren Burger, William Rehnquist, and John Roberts. Although rambling at times, one must feel grateful for the opportunity of sharing in all of these experiences and the thought processes behind so many landmark decisions. Besides you can't help but smile at the photo on the cover portraying Justice Stevens' engaging smile and signature bow tie.

"As a postscript to my brief comments about the first twelve leaders of the Supreme Court, I should add my opinion that five chiefs stand out as national leaders entitled to our highest respect: John Jay, John Marshall, William Howard Taft, Charles Evans Hughes, and Harlan F. Stone."

Jason says

This book was disappointing. I was expecting an examination of what the five Chief Justices are like and their contributions as seen by a longtime member of the court. Instead the book is partly a discussion of the chiefs but mostly its a rambling memoir, similar to but not as interesting as all the other books on recent Supreme Court history. In essence this is a way for Justice Stevens to get the last word on some cases, the outcome of which he disagrees with.

JQAdams says

This is a very discursive sort of book; Stevens free-associates about whatever he wants to, producing a whole that is less "memoir" than the subtitle suggests (you'll get several-page discussions about the legal merits of certain arguments) but not really a sustained legal or historical study, either. That is, while most of the chapters are structured around the tenure of one particular Chief Justice, there's no pretense of covering them systematically. Instead, there will be a grab bag of personal recollections of those justices, remarks about things that happened to occur while those justices headed the court, and analysis of idiosyncratically selected cases that the court decided.

As such it gives a much better sense of Justice Stevens's personality than about any particular topic, and Stevens seems engaging enough. And there are a lot of interesting behind-the-scenes tidbits about things like the layout of the Supreme Court building -- Stevens is kind of hilariously annoyed about a decision to move the table in the justices' conference room; for no obvious reason, the main floor only has room for eight justices' chambers on the main floor, so Sonia Sotomayor (and David Souter before her) is off by herself on a different floor -- or the decision process in individual cases. I don't know that I would recommend the book for most people, but I enjoyed it a lot more than the somewhat similar E. O. Wilson book I read recently.

Nicholas says

Try as I might, I just couldn't finish it. I'm a fan of most popular writing about the Supreme Court--not just Toobin, but also biographies of justices. But this was just so dull. At once too detailed about some pretty mundane aspects of Stevens' life and almost too abstract about the role of the law. He also tended to talk about the intricacies of some of the major cases as if we are all necessarily familiar with them already. This was true for me for a few of them, but not most. I kept on telling myself it would get better the closer we got to the present, but I kept on being wrong. I gave up about halfway through Burger.

Robert Hill says

I always find books and information about the Supreme Court interesting. I have difficulty reading and understanding about half of the prose of Supreme Court Justices. My opinion about their prose is that they express several ideas, or present an idea and modify it within the same sentence. I suppose this is part of their legal training. Accordingly, about half of Justice Stevens comments about previous Supreme Court decisions are difficult for me to understand.

There are several facts in the book that I found fascinating. In his discussion of Earl Warren's role in the Kennedy Assassination investigation he tells the story of Earl Warren and Gerald Ford interviewing Jack Ruby. They wanted to know Ruby's motive for killing Oswald. Ruby indicated that he wanted to spare Jackie Kennedy from having to testify at a future trial.

I found his discussion of the Citizens United case very interesting and illuminating. He disagreed with the result of the case that Corporations could make unlimited financial contributions to political campaigns. The Court decided the case by indicating that Free Speech, equated by financial contributions, should not be

limited. I liked his thinking that actually free speech is limited all the time, in placing time limits on debates for instance and by limiting the time of lawyers advocating their positions before Courts. These limits are routinely imposed.

I also found his discussion of death penalty cases very interesting. After reading his analysis I am thinking that death penalty cases might actually be "just" as the latest decisions of the Supreme Court have modified the law in these cases.

I enjoyed his discussion of Chief Justice Roberts. I am less prone to believe that Roberts is a political hack after reading this book. His presentation of Justice Scalia's positions lead me to believe that Justice Scalia is less incompetent than I have been thinking.

His analysis of the cases which were written by Justice Thomas reinforces my view that he probably is a political hack or just may lack intellect. The cases involved the proliferation of laws advocating carrying weapons by individuals. My own opinion is that these laws inhibit good law enforcement and add to unnecessary violence in our society.

I found his description of how the Court actually functions, seating arrangements and traditions of the Court very informative and interesting. It is interesting to me that one of the traditions involves a new associate justice sitting in Chief Justice John Marshall's chair in their first sitting with the Court as interesting.

I enjoyed the book even though I found some of the legal subject matter over my head.

Rick says

Man, JP Stevens never forgets a grudge. And he never fails to describe a grudge in the politest possible terms. He spent like seventy-five pages not quite saying that CJ Rehnquist was a peacocking slacker who never read the Constitution. I love it, but you have to love that kind of stuff to love this book.

JP Stevens's editor could have used a heavier hand. Still, breezy, a quick read, and enjoyable.

Also, a good crash course on all of the terrible constitutional decisions in the last thirty years. Spoiler: Many were by Rehnquist.

Kristen says

I received this book through the firstreads program, and it sat on my shelf for a while. Once I finally opened it and got into the first chapter, on the Court's first twelve chief justices, I quickly needed to call a lawyer friend for a better explanation of the *Chisholm v. Georgia* (1793) case, which established - or actually didn't establish - U.S. law on sovereign immunity.

My putting the book aside for a while wasn't a judgment on its style - because Stevens writes beautifully. It was more my feeling not quite up to not understanding the cases that he breezily refers to. I don't depend upon *Da Vinci Code's* short chapters to boost my smarts self-esteem, but *Five Chiefs* was an uncomfortable stretch.

When I got back to the book, I decided to just plow through. I wouldn't call Jack or endlessly google the references, I'd just get what I could from the book. That actually turned out to be quite a bit.

My takeaways:

- * There have been great chief justices (including John Jay, John Marshall, William Howard Taft, Charles Evans Hughes, and Harlan F. Stone), adequate chief justices, and inadequate ones (including Roger Taney - author of *Dred Scott* - and William Rehnquist).
- * The justices disagree without being disagreeable. Stevens truly believes this. His harsher criticisms of the judges he served with - Rehnquist and Thomas in particular - are still couched in friendly disappointment.
- * You're more likely to become a justice if your name is Marshall, Rutledge, Chase, Harlan, Jackson, Johnson, Lamar, or White.
- * Most of the Court's decisions are in no way cut and dried, obviously right or wrong. And yet the justices clearly think about them within a legalistic/constitutional framework that often seems arbitrary.

For instance, Stevens writes about the Court's decision in *Standard Oil Co. v. United States* and *United States v. American Tobacco Co.*, saying that the 1911 Court found that those companies had violated the Sherman antitrust law. "In reaching that result, [then Chief Justice] White discussed at length the so-called rule of reason — the rule stating that only acts that unreasonably restrain trade violate federal antitrust laws."

As I explained in an opinion written shortly after I joined the Court, it was necessary to adopt such a rule because a literal reading of the text of the Sherman Act would have outlawed the entire body of private contract law.

OK. But how can that possibly not end up being arbitrary?

Stevens, by the way, was appointed by President Ford, a Republican, and voted with conservatives until conservatives out-conservated themselves into radicalism. He ended up escaping being boxed. He's kind of an old-school Republican libertarian moderate. Of the justices he's served with, he had the most good to say about Thurgood Marshall and the least good to say about the man who took Marshall's seat, Clarence Thomas.

I think that the very best insight Stevens offers comes on page 187, in relation to those two men.

While Thurgood's jurisprudence reflected an understanding that the Constitution was drafted "to form a more perfect union" - and thus to accommodate unforeseen changes in society - Justice Thomas's repeated emphasis on historical analysis seems to assume that we should view the Union as perfect at the beginning and subject to improvements only by following the cumbersome process of amending the Constitution.

Another important takeaway is Stevens's old-fashioned emphasis on etiquette and tradition, possibly part of the foundation of the justices' ability to work together despite sharp and momentous disagreements. Shaking hands. No stripes on the Chief Justice's robes (as Rehnquist initiated and Roberts declined to continue).

About those stripes:

Like the gold stripes on his robes, Chief Justice Rehnquist's writing about sovereignty was ostentatious and more reflective of the ancient British monarchy than our modern republic. I am hopeful that his writings in this area will not be long remembered.

Ouch.

Megan says

Enjoying this book is going to depend entirely on how fascinating you find Supreme Court procedures and rulings. If you are interested in personalities and gossip of high-powered Washington insiders, you will only get glimpses. Stevens, it seems, is a gentleman. He rates each of the Chief Justices under whom he worked (either as clerk, arguing advocate, or fellow justice). Stevens seems to strive to combine accuracy with tact and fairness in his analyses. He includes strengths and weaknesses for everyone in both rulings and Court management. He spends the bulk of the book discussing various rulings that he feels were significant under each chief, and cases he thinks exemplify the style of each chief. If you find Constitutional interpretation interesting (which I usually do), then you'll enjoy most of this book. Thrown among these cases are explanations of procedure and set-up which are sometimes interesting and sometimes more than I really needed to know. There are also the occasional looks at personalities and lightly humorous anecdotes. I'm sure Stevens could have provided more, and for many readers, it would have been nice to feel a greater connection to the people than the cases. However, Stevens obviously values the work of the Supreme Court over gossip, as well he should.

Yune says

I quietly adored this book, but I'm still pretty new to SCOTUS literature (Toobin's *The Nine* is now on my reading list). As with most of my realizations about politics, it hit me rather belatedly how far-reaching the U.S. Supreme Court's decisions could be, and this particular branch of the government is wrapped up in Latin and a preponderance of older folks in dark robes and the accompanying intimidation factor.

Aspects I particularly appreciated: a human face to the justices--

Basketball was his particular favorite, at least while his son was a star on his high school team. I am told that Bill sometimes used rather strong language to voice his disapproval of unfavorable rulings by the referee in his son's games.

...a willingness to speak forthrightly about matters he disagreed with, while remaining excruciatingly polite about it--

I understand that he enforced a ten-day rule that accorded his clerks only that limited time period in which to complete the first draft of every one of his opinions. No matter how large the record was or how difficult the legal issues were, the draft was due in ten days. I think the quality of some of his opinions may have been adversely affected by that rule.

...clear explanations of the ramifications of each case discussed, and of the procedures used by the High Court that even a layman such as I could understand, often with a bit of history thrown in. Of course, someone better familiar with these aspects might rightfully find Justice Stevens's gentle pace to be boring.

It is also quite possible that people with different political views than Justice Stevens (and c'mon, we all know they each have leanings) would find this book less appealing. But there's such lucidity in the arguments made that I can see the reasonableness of the presented viewpoint. The prose was smooth without

being overly facile, the way a particularly intelligent and kind great-uncle might teach things to you, with accompanying sparks of humor.

This is not a comprehensive book by any means, either in terms of the cases discussed (Justice Stevens picks out cases he believes to be of special note in each chief's era) or in gossip (if anything, I found myself marveling over the air of congeniality maintained among the justices). But it was illuminating -- and reassuring, in some ways -- to see how some of the most impactful decisions in my country are made from that side of the bench.

A dissenting judge is never happy, because it is obvious that either the majority has come to the wrong conclusion or his own reasoning is flawed. There are times, however, when a member of the majority may be unhappy about the outcome because he or she may disagree with the result that the law requires. As Thurgood Marshall observed on more than one occasion, the Constitution does not prohibit Congress from enacting stupid laws.
