

Through the 115 Justices that have served on the United States Supreme Court, there have been a total of five female Justices. The first of these, Sandra Day O'Connor, was appointed as a Justice in 1981. Throughout O'Connor's life, she made a vast impact on the people of the United States.

Throughout the Senate confirmation hearings of Ketanji Brown Jackson, O'Connor's name was frequently mentioned. If confirmed, Jackson will be the first African-American woman on the Supreme Court. Senator Cory Booker talked about how the white men who founded America were crucial, but there is a strong need for people who are different from these white men on the Supreme Court. He mentions how it was so important and exciting when Sandra Day O'Connor was confirmed to be the first woman on the Supreme Court, and now Jackson is positioned to become the first African American woman, a new first for the Supreme Court.

On March 26, 1930, Sandra Day O'Connor was born in El Paso, Texas. Her parents, Ada Mae and Harry, owned a successful cattle ranch in a region of southeastern Arizona. O'Connor grew up helping her parents on the ranch. She started reading at the age of 4. O'Connor was sent to El Paso, where she lived with her grandmother, to attend a school better suited for her. At the age of 16, O'Connor graduated from high school. She was accepted into her father's dream school that he did not attend, Stanford University, where she thrived and became Senior Class President. After graduating college with a bachelor's degree in economics, O'Connor went on to Stanford Law School, where she received her law degree in 1952. While attending law school, O'Connor was also a member of the Board of Editors for the *Stanford Law Review*.



As a woman, O'Connor was considered a minority, meaning that not many people she was surrounded by at law school were women. In an interview with PBS, O'Connor recalls seeing a list of job opportunities with phone numbers at law school. She remembers calling all of them, and almost all of them saying that they weren't looking for women, but for men. A National Women's History article reads that she eventually found a job that did not pay her, though she still worked there.

Before she was appointed to the Supreme Court, O'Connor worked as an attorney and served as a judge on the Arizona Court of Appeals. When Ronald Reagan was campaigning for his election, he made a promise to appoint a woman to the Supreme Court. On September 25, 1981, at 51 years of age, Sandra Day O'Connor was sworn in as a Supreme Court Justice, making history as the first woman to ever serve on the United States Supreme Court.

While Sandra Day O'Connor served on the Supreme Court, she was a decisive vote for many decisions and cases. O'Connor was extremely careful about her decisions, especially on landmark cases, and she would constantly think about them, even when she was not working. For example, O'Connor's husband has said that O'Connor was looking at an ultrasound of her grandchild at the same time as she had to think about whether abortion should be legal. O'Connor contributed to important cases such as *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, *Bush v. Vera*, *Kelo v. New London*, *Mississippi University for Women v. Hogan*, and many others. O'Connor worked deliberately to come up with her views on abortion. She thought about them throughout a long period of time, changed her views, and ultimately thought that there should be a right to an abortion, but that limits should apply. O'Connor did not let personal feelings on abortion influence her final decision in court. O'Connor also worked on cases concerning gay



rights, and felt that people should be allowed to marry a partner of the same sex. After retiring from the Supreme Court, O'Connor officiated one of the first ever gay marriages at the Supreme Court.

In 1993, Ruth Bader Ginsburg was appointed to the Supreme Court as the second woman to serve on the court. Though Ginsburg and O'Connor didn't always agree, they both fought for women's equality. In Linda Hirshman's book, *Sisters In Law: How Sandra Day O'Connor and Ruth Bader Ginsburg Went to the Supreme Court and Changed The World*, she calls the two "Sisters in Law," and writes that Ginsburg was very happy to be welcomed to the Supreme Court by O'Connor and was sad to see O'Connor retire.

In addition to being the first woman to serve on the Supreme Court, she also made other important contributions. Sandra Day O'Connor has also contributed to the United States with helping educate young people about civics. O'Connor's legacy includes a camp where middle school aged students can be educated on democracy. In addition, Sandra Day O'Connor has both a high school and a law school named after her, demonstrating her significance to the U.S.

O'Connor made an impact on the world. She won many awards and has many tributes around the United States. In 2003, O'Connor was awarded the Liberty Medal from Philadelphia's National Constitution Center. Two years later, the United States Military Academy awarded Sandra Day O'Connor the Sylvanus Thayer Award. O'Connor was only the third woman to receive this award. Barack Obama awarded the exceptional Presidential Medal of Freedom to Sandra Day O'Connor. This famous award is one of the highest civilian honors in the United States.



Sandra Day O'Connor is a famous woman in history and arguably, one of the most influential. Many girls and women throughout the country are inspired by her achievements. Roslyn Silver, a federal judge for the U.S. district court for the district of Arizona, spoke to O'Connor, and was glad with O'Connor's firm but sweet personality. Silver was inspired by the fact that O'Connor wasn't shy with scolding her co-workers. Sandra Day O'Connor may have been the first woman to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court, but will be far from the last.

