Supreme Court Justices with Ties to New Jersey

Ruth Bader Ginsburg

Born: March 15, 1933 (Brooklyn, NY)

Died: September 18, 2020 (Washington, DC)

Notable Positions

- United States Supreme Court Justice
- Founder of Women's Rights Project of the ACLU
- Assistant Professor at Rutgers School of Law

Ruth Bader Ginsburg is proudly remembered as the second female justice to be appointed to the United States Supreme Court. Raised in a working-class, Jewish family in Brooklyn, Ginsburg was always taught the importance of education. She went on to receive a Bachelor of Arts from Cornell University and received her Juris Doctorate from Harvard Law School. Only one of eight females in her 500-student law school class, she was constantly chastised and critiqued for her status as a woman in law, then a heavily male-dominated field. Regardless, Ginsburg excelled in her profession and went on to found the Women's Rights Project of the American Civil Liberties Union. After a long life and accomplished legal career, Ginsburg unfortunately lost her long-standing battle with cancer at 87 years of age.

Notable Decision

United States v. Virginia

Judge Ginsburg wrote the majority opinion in favor of the United States, who was suing the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) in regard to its male-only admissions policy. Opting to create an all-female counterpart of VMI following the Courts' reversal of the decision, a plan which the District Court and Circuit Court later affirmed, the United States appealed to the Supreme Court. Judge Ginsburg ruled that the admissions policy violated the Equal Protection Clause and failed to maintain that the all-male student body maintained educational diversity. Judge Ginsburg also noted that any gender-based classifications should be evaluated with "heightened scrutiny."

Note: Oyez, Justia, and the Cornell Legal Information Institute were referenced in the above bios.

Samuel Anthony Alito, Jr.

Born: April 1, 1950 (Trenton, NJ)

Notable Positions

- United States Supreme Court Justice
- Circuit Judge for the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit
- U.S. Attorney, District of New Jersey

Samuel Anthony Alito, Jr. was raised in Hamilton, New Jersey by an Italian father and American mother. He received an A.B. from Princeton University. He served in the U.S. Army Reserve, and later graduated from Yale Law School. He clerked for the Honorable Leonard I. Garth of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit following his law school graduation, and then worked as an Assistant District Attorney for four years before moving to Washington D.C., where he worked with the Solicitor General and Attorney General. He returned to New Jersey, working as an U.S. Attorney prior to his nomination to the Third Circuit Court of Appeals, where he sat for 15 years before he was nominated to the U.S. Supreme Court in 2005. He remains on the bench, having developed a distinct interpretation of a traditional American political philosophy.

Notable Decision

The American Legion v. American Humanist Association

Judge Alito wrote the majority opinion in this case, where the American Humanist Association (a non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring the separation of church and state), along with non-Christian residents near a veteran's memorial park in Maryland sued the American Legion for the presence of a 40-foot tall cross ("Bladensburg Cross") that they claimed violated the Establishment Clause. Judge Alito, in a 7-3 decision for the American Legion, ruled that the Bladensburg cross did not violate the Establishment clause because it had become a symbol to honor those that fought in World War I. Furthermore, using the test previously established in *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (an Establishment clause-based case involving taxpayer money being used to fund non-secular schools), the Court found that the cross carried a secular purpose, and did not advance, inhibit, or endorse any religion.

Note: Oyez, Justia, and the Cornell Legal Information Institute were referenced in the above bios.

Sonia Sotomayor

Born: June 25, 1954 (Bronx, NY)

Notable Positions

- United States Supreme Court Justice
- Circuit Judge for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit
- Assistant District Attorney, District of Manhattan

Sonia Sotomayor was born in The Bronx to Puerto Rican parents. She grew up in a housing project with a single mother (following the death of her father in her formative years). Watching crime shows on television, such as *Perry Mason*, initially inspired her to become an attorney. She graduated from Princeton University with a B.A. in 1976 and graduated from Yale Law School in 1979. Following law school, she worked as an Assistant District Attorney in New York and practiced intellectual property law. She was nominated as a federal judge to the District Court for the Southern District of New York, gaining traction for the handful of high-profile cases she received. She then was nominated to the Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, and later nominated to the U.S. Supreme Court in 2009. Justice Sotomayor is the first female and Hispanic individual to serve as an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court.

Notable Decision

Collins v. Virginia

A police officer had lifted a tarp covering a motorcycle on private property, after previously observing said motorcycle violating traffic laws. The owner of the vehicle, Ray Austin Collins, had avoided confrontation with law enforcement on multiple occasions. Upon the suspect arriving at the private property (his residence), the officer confronted him and he confessed. At trial, the defendant attempted to suppress his evidence by claiming that the officer conducted an unlawful search. But the Court rejected this and cited that the search was based on probable cause and fell under a Fourth Amendment exception. Collins was found guilty and convicted. The appeals court and the Virginia Supreme Court affirmed the decision upon appeal. The Supreme Court ruled 8-1 in favor of Collins, with Justice Sotomayor. The Court wrote that the Fourth Amendment does not allow officers to enter and search the exterior of someone's home without a warrant, even if the object is an automobile. (The Fourth Amendment automobile exception allows for certain searches to be conducted without warrant due to the mobility of the evidence.) Ultimately, the Court ruled that a warrantless search of an automobile parked within the exterior of one's home is not permissible.

Note: Oyez, Justia, and the Cornell Legal Information Institute were referenced in the above bios.

Mahlon Pitney

Born: Feb 8, 1858 (Morristown, NJ)

Died: Dec 9, 1924

Notable Positions

- United States Supreme Court Justice
- U.S. House of Representatives (Congressman)
- New Jersey State Senate

Mahlon Pitney graduated from Princeton University and later attended law school. He practiced law for a couple years, before deciding to run for office. Pitney was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1894, and then moved to the New Jersey Senate. He then was nominated to sit on the New Jersey Supreme Court in 1901. In 1912, President William Howard Taft nominated Pitney to the U.S. Supreme Court. Pitney held a more conservative view on the law, frequently taking a narrow interpretation of First Amendment rights. Pitney resigned from the Supreme Court in 1922.

Notable Decision

Coppage v. Kansas

A Kansas law banned "yellow dog contracts" (employer agreements barring employees from joining a labor union during the time of their employment). T. B. Coppage, an employer, fired an employee who refused to sign an agreement. Coppage was consequently charged and convicted of violating this Kansas law. Coppage appealed. The Court ruled in favor of Kansas. There are legitimate exercises of state police power being used to override freedom of contract, but the State of Kansas failed to provide a connection between the statute's purpose and the usage of police-power.

Note: Oyez, Justia, and the Cornell Legal Information Institute were referenced in the above bios.

Joseph P. Bradley

Born: Mar 14, 1813 (Morristown, NJ)

Died: Jan 22, 1892

Notable Positions

- United States Supreme Court Justice
- 1876 Electoral Commission
- Travelling Circuit Judge (Fifth Circuit)

Joseph P. Bradley attended Rutgers College in New Jersey, and then went on to go to law school and practiced law in New Jersey. Bradley was appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1870, and was also assigned as a travelling circuit judge to the Fifth Circuit. In 1877, Bradley was named to the Electoral Commission created to resolve the 1876 presidential election. As a justice, Bradley expanded the powers of the federal government, which was instrumental in Reconstruction following the Civil War.

Notable Decision

Slaughter-House Cases

Louisiana passed a law that only permitted one slaughterhouse in New Orleans to remain (Crescent City Company), and all other slaughterhouses were expected to close indefinitely. A group of butchers banded together and filed a lawsuit, claiming that this constituted a monopoly and violated the Thirteenth Amendment since it created involuntary servitude. In addition, it violated the Equal Protection and Due Process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. In a 5-4 decision, the Court ruled that it did not violate either amendment. The Court argued that these amendments only applied to former slaves, granting them full rights. Furthermore, they held that the butchers could still slaughter on Crescent City Company grounds.

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