

The Annotated Bobblehead

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor

It is hard to measure one person's influence on a multi-member body of strong-minded individuals, but surely Justice Sandra Day O'Connor's influence at the Supreme Court has been substantial. She has occupied a unique position on the Court in a number of ways, as the only Justice with legislative experience, with state-court experience, and, for many years, with experience as a woman. She has cast the deciding vote and written key opinions in many important and controversial cases. We have done our best to capture some of what makes her special in this, our third ceramic Supreme Court portrait.

In an indemnity dispute between a Japanese valve stem producer and a Taiwanese motorcycle tire tube maker, the California state courts asserted jurisdiction over the Japanese company, whose only contacts with the state were some valves that it had sold to the Taiwanese company in Taiwan, but which had ended up in California. The Justice, speaking for the Court, rejected this exercise in international judicial imperialism on due process grounds. *Asahi Metal Industry Co. v. Superior Court*, 480 U.S. 102 (1987).

She has played a leading role in the Court's jurisprudence of gerrymandering. In *Bush v. Vera*, 517 U.S. 952 (1996), she found the "bizarre" shapes of Texas congressional districts 18 and 29 to be products of an excessive commitment to segregating voters on the basis of race, and thus unconstitutional.



A Washington state judge took the side of grandparents seeking visitation rights, holding that custodial fit parents bear the burden of disproving that visitation is in a child's best interests. The judge ordered visitation in part because it would compel the children to spend their summers the way he had spent fondly recalled summers in his youth. *Troxel v. Granville*, 530 U.S. 57 (2000). Justice O'Connor rejected this refusal to honor the wishes of a fit parent as a violation of parents' "fundamental right ... to make decisions concerning the care, custody, and control of their children."

Justice O'Connor has been forthright about the effect of her upbringing on the Lazy B ranch on her values and character: "I felt molded in large part by my life in the Southwest, where I had spent my earliest days on a cattle ranch in a dry and isolated part of the Arizona desert." *The Majesty of the Law* ix (2003). Her family ran polled Hereford cattle, marked with the Lazy B brand, during her childhood there. *Lazy B* 168 (2002).

The shoes she wore on September 25, 1981, when she was sworn in as the first female Justice of the Supreme Court.