

Harry A. Blackmun

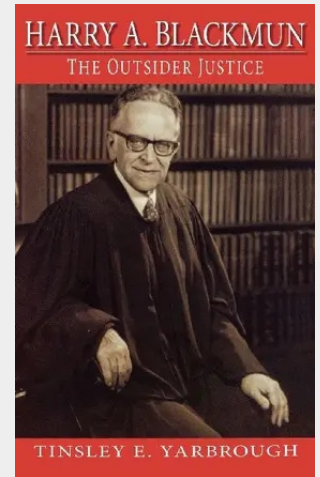
The Outsider Justice

Justice Harry A. Blackmun, author of the majority opinion in *Roe v. Wade*, was the pivotal figure in one of the most contentious decisions in Supreme Court history and indeed the most divisive issue facing the Court today. *Harry A. Blackmun: The Outsider Justice* is Tinsley E. Yarbrough's penetrating account of one of the most outspoken and complicated figures on the modern Supreme Court. As a justice, Blackmun stood at the pinnacle of the American judiciary. Yet when he took his seat on the Court, Justice Blackmun felt "almost desperate," overwhelmed with feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy over the immense responsibilities before him. Blackmun had overcome humble roots to achieve a Harvard education, success as a Minneapolis lawyer and resident counsel to the prestigious Mayo Clinic. But growing up in a financially unstable home with a frequently unemployed father and an emotionally fragile mother left a permanent mark on the future justice. All his life, Harry Blackmun considered himself one of society's outsiders, someone who did not "belong." Remarkably, though, that very self-image instilled in the justice, throughout his career, a deep empathy for society's most vulnerable outsiders—women faced with unwanted pregnancies, homosexuals subjected to archaic laws, and ultimately, death-row inmates. To those who saw his career as the constitutional "odyssey" of a conservative jurist gradually transformed into a champion of the underdog, Blackmun had a ready answer: he had not changed; the Court and the issues before them changed. Drawing on considerable archival research and a wealth of knowledge of Supreme Court history, Yarbrough has written a nuanced and deeply insightful account of the life and career of one of the court's most intriguing justices.

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