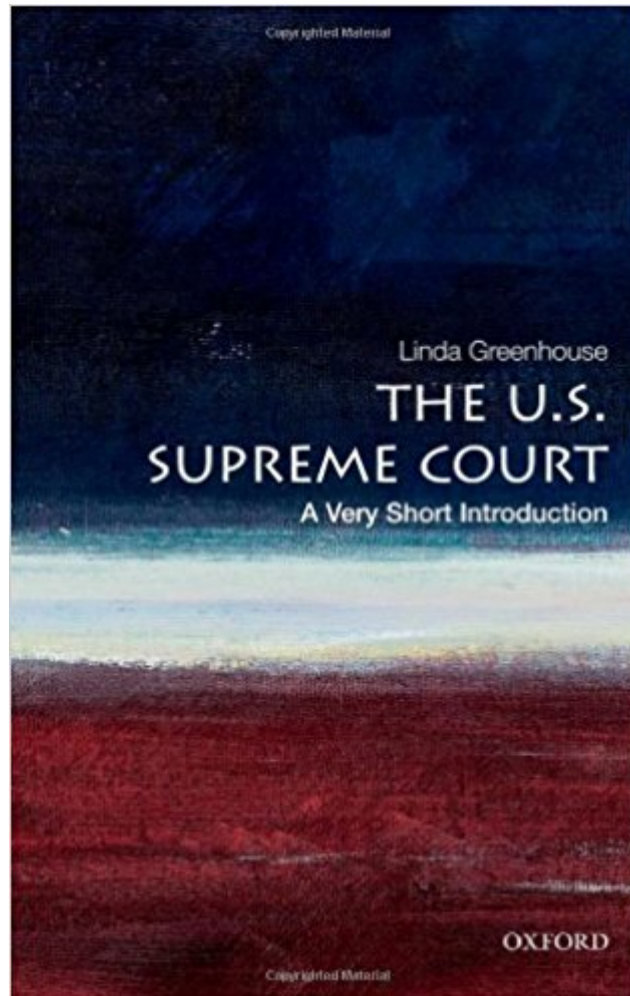




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# The U.S. Supreme Court: A Very Short Introduction



## Synopsis

For 30 years, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Linda Greenhouse chronicled the activities of the U.S. Supreme Court and its justices as a correspondent for the New York Times. In this Very Short Introduction, she draws on her deep knowledge of the court's history and of its written and unwritten rules to show readers how the Supreme Court really works. Greenhouse offers a fascinating institutional biography of a place and its people--men and women who exercise great power but whose names and faces are unrecognized by many Americans and whose work often appears cloaked in mystery. How do cases get to the Supreme Court? How do the justices go about deciding them? What special role does the chief justice play? What do the law clerks do? How does the court relate to the other branches of government? Greenhouse answers these questions by depicting the justices as they confront deep constitutional issues or wrestle with the meaning of confusing federal statutes. Throughout, the author examines many individual Supreme Court cases to illustrate points under discussion, ranging from *Marbury v. Madison*, the seminal case which established judicial review, to the recent *District of Columbia v. Heller* (2008), which struck down the District of Columbia's gun-control statute and which was, surprisingly, the first time in its history that the Court issued an authoritative interpretation of the Second Amendment. To add perspective, Greenhouse also compares the Court to foreign courts, revealing interesting differences. For instance, no other country in the world has chosen to bestow life tenure on its judges. A superb overview packed with telling details, this volume offers a matchless introduction to one of the pillars of American government.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"[A] new one-of-a-kind book on the Supreme Court." --SCOTUSblog "Linda Greenhouse has long been one of the most astute observers of the U.S. Supreme Court and most trusted translators of its mysteries and traditions. This elegant and concise guide is invaluable for beginners and veteran court watchers alike. An ideal introduction to the Court for students and citizens of all ages."

--Jeffrey Rosen, professor of law, George Washington University, and legal affairs editor, The New Republic "There is hardly anyone in the country, outside the Court, who knows the institution and its practices as well as Linda Greenhouse does."--Melvin I. Urofsky, author of Louis D. Brandeis: A Life

"Greenhouse cogently illustrates the history, functions, composition and importance of the Supreme Court. In a slim volume that you can literally carry around in your pocket, you will find a wealth of knowledge." --Yale Daily News "[A]n amuse-bouche of a book . . . short, but pithy. After finishing this book, readers should be inspired to take up [Greenhouse's] implicit invitation to read about the Court and its impact on shaping American law in a more substantial, meatier format."

--Judicature "For those interested in how cases come to be heard by the Court, the process leading to a decision and the Court's relationship with the other branches of the federal government and the public, this is an excellent way to begin." --Washington Independent Review of Books

Linda Greenhouse was the New York Times Supreme Court correspondent for 30 years, covering thousands of decisions written by 18 different justices. She was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in journalism (beat reporting) in 1998. She is now Knight Distinguished Journalist in Residence and Joseph Goldstein Lecturer in Law at Yale Law School and writes a biweekly opinion column on the Supreme Court and the law for the New York Times web site. Her books include *Becoming Justice Blackmun: Harry Blackmun's Supreme Court Journey* and *Before Roe v. Wade: Voices That Shaped the Abortion Debate Before the Supreme Court's Ruling* (with Reva B. Siegel).

I wanted a small and succinct reference book and there may be a better one, but I can't imagine there is. Something I was looking for was a list of all the justices and when they served. This book has that list and it's current; including Justices Roberts and Alito. When one is reading about a certain court decision one can look at that list and see who the other justices were and what president nominated them. Just what I was looking for.

I unreservedly recommend Greenhouse's book for distinguished jurists and lawyers, as well as for laymen interested in the Constitution and the functioning of the Supreme Court. There are

marvelous nuggets of personal insight and of judicial history and analysis that would enlighten us all. Linda Greenhouse is one of my favorite Supreme Court chroniclers of our era. Winner of the Pulitzer Prize and other distinguished awards for her NEW YORK TIMES coverage of the Supreme Court (1978 to 2007, with a two-year break in the mid-80s), Greenhouse is uncommonly well versed in the Constitution, the Supreme Court, and the judicial personalities of recent Court justices. She also displays flashes of personal opinion, especially on abortion, same-sex marriage, and a flexible application of a constitution written nearly 250 years ago. Taking early retirement from the TIMES in 2008, Greenhouse teaches at Yale Law School and writes frequent, opinionated TIMES commentary columns. The most recent, 7/10/13, was on the debilitating long-term affect of carefully crafted, compromise Court majority opinions. THE SUPREME COURT is part of the Oxford Very Short Introduction series that, since, 1995, has covered over 300 topics. In only 98 pages Greenhouse provides a thumb-nail sketch of the Supreme Court's history and several turning-point cases. Far more important, she describes, with exquisite examples: how the Court functions, critical issues of law, the long-term impact of public opinion, and how personal the process can become. This is the inside story from a highly-respected insider. (Seven of nine sitting Supreme Court justices attended her farewell party.) As a layman, I have included the Constitution and various Supreme Court decisions in my college American history courses for over two decades, have read many books on diverse aspects of the Supreme Court, and, on occasion, have made public presentations on the Constitution. Greenhouse's book makes me feel like a constitutional and Supreme Court neophyte. Greenhouse has drawn on her forty plus years of experience to capture the essence of the Supreme Court through pithy examples and well-grounded personal opinions. Perhaps most surprising, in such a slim book, is the space devoted to her criticism of life-time appointments for Supreme Court justices. She highlights that this is not the practice globally in any long-established judicial system. However, she does not suggest that a constitutional amendment changing this is even a remote possibility. .

Needed this for a college class, it was much cheaper to download it on Kindle cloud then buying a paper version I will never look at again and I had it right away

Very instuctional!

Clearly written, easy to understand. Very helpful guide to a basic understanding of how the court works.

a fabulous book.....hard to underline because every sentence is important

This is a very complex topic....and this book did a great job netting it out!!

NY Times Supreme Court reporter/ author Linda Greenhouse shows her knowledge of the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) in this short book. I, apparently, read the book's first printing in which Greenhouse incorrectly described the Lynch v. Donnelly decision as a school prayer case. The actual Lynch opinion permitted placing a creche in a RI public park along with other holiday symbols. Lee v. Weisman was the junior high graduation prayer case. When I e-mailed her about this, she immediately and graciously responded to me that this mix-up had been corrected after the first printing. Kudos to her! Again, this book is worth reading for the Court's history, interaction with Congresses and Presidents, and the cases discussed.

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