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Book Notes: The Majesty of the Law: Reflections of a Supreme Court Justice, by Sandra Day O'Connor

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THE MAJESTY OF THE LAW: REFLECTIONS OF A SUPREME COURT JUSTICE. BY SANDRA DAY O'CONNOR. NEW YORK: RANDOM HOUSE TRADE PAPERBACKS, 2003. Pp. xvii + 318. Notes, bibliography, index. \$22.95 paper.

BY NADINE BLUM

On 25 September 1981, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor was appointed by President Reagan as the first female Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. *The Majesty of the Law* offers O'Connor's wide-ranging perspective on the historical development and the modern role of the U.S. Supreme Court.

O'Connor traces key decisions of the Court, such as *Brown v. Board of Education*, which have shaped modern conceptions of justice and humanity. She profiles a number of justices, including Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., William Howard Taft, Charles Evans Hughes, and Thurgood Marshall, whom she feels were particularly important in shaping the American justice system.

Of particular interest is O'Connor's discussion of women and the law. She recounts her own experience as a young student, lawyer, and mother, and the challenges she experienced in attempting to balance career ambitions with her family priorities. Describing herself as a "beneficiary" of society's changes in attitude towards "women's work," She examines the historical journey that women have taken in their struggle for political empowerment—from the struggle for the vote, to accessing positions of power in schools, the courts, and corporations. O'Connor is concerned with the realities of the "glass ceiling" that persist for women in corporations as well as the failures of the law to make adequate accommodation for the disproportionate social and economic burden of child care experienced by women.

O'Connor's critique of the jury system is also interesting. She argues that the poor treatment of jurors, the abuse of unlimited "for cause" challenges in jury selection, and the fact that jurors are often ill-prepared for the complexity and legal requirements their job entails have led to a lower standard of justice and a lessening of public respect for the legal system.

Overall, while she does not delve deeply into any serious critique of U.S. law or policy, readers will likely appreciate the way O'Connor, who some have described as the "most influential woman in America," views her historic role on the Court.
