



William Joseph Brennan, Jr.

Supreme Court Justice (1906 – 1997)

William Brennan was known for his outspoken progressive views, including opposition to the death penalty and support for abortion rights. He was considered to be among the Supreme Court's most influential members.

Brennan was born in New Jersey and attended public schools before graduating in 1928 from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. He graduated from Harvard Law School in 1931. In 1949, Brennan was appointed to the New Jersey Superior Court by Governor Alfred E. Driscoll, and two years later, he was appointed to the state Supreme Court. He was named to the U.S. Supreme Court through a recess appointment by DWIGHT EISENHOWER in 1956, shortly before the 1956 presidential election. Presidential advisers thought the appointment of a Catholic Democrat from the Northeast would woo critical voters in the upcoming election for Eisenhower, a Republican.

His nomination was opposed by Senator Joseph McCarthy who had read transcripts of Brennan's speech where he decried overzealous anti-communist investigations as "witch-hunts." But he was confirmed by a near-unanimous vote, with only McCarthy voting against him. He held the post until his retirement on July 20, 1990 for health reasons; he was succeeded on the Court by Justice David Souter. Brennan then taught at Georgetown University Law Center until 1994. With 1,360 opinions, he is second only to William O. Douglas in number of opinions written while a Supreme Court justice.

Brennan's wife Marjorie died in 1982. A few months later, in 1983, he married Mary Fowler, who had served as his secretary for 26 years. He was 77 years old. Brennan's colleagues learned of his second marriage via a short office memo stating, "Mary Fowler and I were married yesterday and we have gone to Bermuda." Brennan became a member of the Century in 1958 when he was sponsored by fellow Supreme Court Justice JOHN MARSHALL HARLAN.

