

# Women of Valor

I am the  
5th woman to  
serve on the U.S.  
Supreme Court.



Amy Coney Barrett



# Meet Amy Coney Barrett

Amy Coney Barrett is the 115th Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, succeeding Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. She is well prepared for her job, having honed her skills as a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit and as a professor at Notre Dame Law School.

Amy also learned about the law by clerking for Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia. He was a major influence on Amy's life and she later said, "His judicial philosophy is mine, too." Like Scalia, Justice Barrett is an **originalist**, believing that the Constitution should be interpreted according to its meaning at the time it was adopted. In her Supreme Court confirmation hearing, Barrett said: "A judge must apply the law as it is written, not as she wishes it were."



## At-a-Glance

- ★ Born Amy Vivian Coney January 28, 1972 in New Orleans, Louisiana
- ★ 115th Justice and fifth woman to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court
- ★ Mother of seven children, including two children adopted from Haiti and one with Down Syndrome
- ★ A role model for women, Amy excelled in school and in her career while embracing a religious life and raising a family



## Young Amy

Amy Coney was raised in a big family in rural Old Metairie, Louisiana. She is the eldest of seven children, with five sisters and one brother. Her mother Linda was a homemaker and taught French at a local high school and her father Michael was a lawyer for Shell Oil Company.

The Coneys are a devout Roman Catholic family, instilling Amy with a strong faith and the values of hard work and integrity. Her father still serves as an ordained deacon at his church in Old Metairie, and her family has been involved in the Christian organization, the People of Praise.

Amy attended Catholic schools and was a standout student. She impressed her classmates at St. Mary's Dominican High School so much that they elected her class vice president. She worked just as hard at Rhodes College in Tennessee and graduated with honors in English Literature and French in 1994.

Amy wanted to serve others through a legal career, so she enrolled at Notre Dame Law School. Not surprisingly, she was very successful there too, and was named the top student in her class, graduating *summa cum laude* (with the highest distinction).

*"What greater thing can you do than raise children? That's where you have your greatest impact on the world."*

Amy Coney Barrett





# Early Career

After graduation, Amy jumped straight into the law, first serving as a clerk for Judge Laurence Silberman of the U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington, DC. She then got her big break when she clerked at the highest court in the land, U.S. Supreme Court, for her mentor Justice Scalia. As a clerk, Amy worked very hard every day to make sure the judges were prepared to make decisions about very important cases.

Amy went on to work at a **prominent** law firm in Washington, DC. Her professional success helped launch her career in academia, as a law professor at George Washington University and Notre Dame. Amy soon emerged as a serious scholar of constitutional law, and became such a

valued instructor that she was recognized three times as Notre Dame's "Distinguished Professor of the Year."

As Amy's popularity at Notre Dame grew, more people wanted to hear what she had to say. She was known for her strong **conservative** and Catholic beliefs and became a respected voice for originalism. Many legal groups, like the Alliance Defending Freedom and the Federalist Society, regularly invited her to their events where she spoke to excited young law students and attorneys who shared her belief in limited government and individual liberty, ideas that are central to the U.S. Constitution.



## A Large Family

*In 1999, Amy married another lawyer from Notre Dame, Jesse M. Barrett. They went on to form their own large family of nine, believing that raising children would be their most significant impact on the world. Two of their seven children were adopted from Haiti, and their youngest child was born with special needs.*

*Like millions of Americans, Jesse and Amy work hard to raise and provide for their children while also having successful careers. Amy credits her success to teamwork with her husband and his aunt, who helped with in-home childcare for 16 years. She also remembers keeping a toy box in her office at Notre Dame so that her daughter Emma could be with her while she was at work. Amy has remarked that flexible workplaces — those that allow children to come to the office — can help working mothers.*





## Circuit Court Judge

President Donald Trump recognized Amy's brilliance as a legal thinker, so in May 2017, he nominated her to serve on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, which hears cases from Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin. The U.S. Senate confirmed her for the Court on October 31, 2017. During her three years on the Seventh Circuit seat, Judge Barrett authored nearly 90 opinions.

In one case in 2019 (*Kanter v. Barr*), Amy's fellow judges on the Seventh Circuit decided that people who had made a mistake in the past and got in trouble with the law couldn't own a gun, but she disagreed. She wrote a **dissenting** opinion, arguing that the plain meaning of the Second Amendment grants Americans—even those who committed **felonies**—the right to own guns to protect themselves, especially if they didn't commit a violent crime.

In another 2019 case (*Doe v. Purdue University*), Amy and her fellow justices heard a case where Purdue University violated a student's right to **due process** and suspended him for a year. She and the rest of the court protected the student's rights by deciding the case in his favor.

*"We shouldn't be putting people on the court that share our policy preferences. We should be putting people on the court who want to apply the Constitution."*

Amy Coney Barrett





# Supreme Court Justice

Amy's remarkable work on the Seventh Circuit led to President Trump nominating her to replace the late justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg on the U.S. Supreme Court. The president praised Amy as a "woman of unparalleled achievement, towering intellect, sterling credentials and unyielding loyalty to the Constitution."

Although many Americans support originalism, some do not, and they did not want Amy to be appointed. They feared that if Amy were confirmed to the Supreme Court, it might become more conservative.

During Amy's confirmation hearings, Democrat senators tested her on many controversial issues like abortion rights, climate change, immigration, same-sex marriage, and the Affordable Care Act. Many of them were also concerned about the potential influence of her strong Catholic faith. Amy calmly listened and responded to their questions, insisting, "I am fully committed to equal justice under the law for all persons."

Impressed by her record and intelligence, the Senate **Judiciary** Committee voted unanimously to advance Amy's nomination to the Supreme Court. On October 26, 2020, the whole Senate confirmed Amy to the Supreme Court in a 52-48 vote, strengthening the court's conservative majority. She was sworn in by Justice Clarence Thomas.



## First Supreme Court Term

In *Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn v. Cuomo* (2020), her first case on America's highest court, Amy decided to uphold the religious rights of all Americans. She, and a majority of her colleagues on the court, struck down Governor Andrew Cuomo's COVID-related restrictions that prevented people from worshiping God as they saw fit.

She wrote her first majority opinion in the 2021 case *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service v. Sierra Club*, where she put reasonable limits on what documents people can access from the government.

As Amy has only been a Supreme Court justice for a short time, her influence is not yet known. Her judicial philosophy will be further revealed in future cases on the Affordable Care Act, voting rights, gun rights, abortion, and religious liberties.



## In Brief: The U.S. Supreme Court

**When was the Supreme Court formed?**

The Court took shape with the passage of the Judiciary Act of 1789 and initially had six Justices.

**How many Justices serve on the Supreme Court?**

The Court is made up of nine Justices, including one Chief Justice and eight Associate Justices. According to the Constitution, Congress determines the number of Justices. Since the Judiciary Act of 1869, there have been nine Justices.

**How does someone become a Justice?**

The President nominates someone for a vacancy on the Court and the Senate votes to confirm the nominee, which requires a simple majority.

**Can anyone serve as a Supreme Court Justice?**

The Constitution does not specify qualifications such as age, education, profession, or native-born citizenship. A Justice does not have to be a lawyer, but all have been trained in the law.

**Do Justices have term limits?**

No. They can only be removed from office by impeachment.

**How many cases does the Court hear each term?**

The Court receives approximately 7,000-8,000 petitions each term but only hears oral arguments in about 80 cases.

**Do all Justices need to be present to hear a case?**

A **quorum** of six Justices is required to decide a case.

**What words are written above the main entrance to the Supreme Court building?**

"EQUAL JUSTICE UNDER LAW" — These words express the ultimate responsibility of the U.S. Supreme Court.





# Fascinating Facts about Amy

- Amy was designated by faculty members as the most outstanding graduate in her undergraduate college's English department.
- Barrett is one of three sitting Supreme Court justices to have worked on landmark case *Bush v. Gore* in 2000 prior to their appointment on the Court. The case ultimately decided the 2000 presidential election, awarding Florida's 25 electoral college votes to Republican candidate George W. Bush.
- Barrett's daughter Vivian was adopted from Haiti at the age of 14 months and weighed just 11 pounds. The Barretts were told that she might never walk normally or talk, but she has overcome these challenges and is very athletic.
- Amy and her husband debated for years whether one parent should stay home to raise their children. She has described "soul-searching and anxiety about balancing kids and work."
- In October 2017, Barrett was out trick-or-treating with her children just an hour before she was voted into the Seventh District Court of Appeals by the U.S. Senate.

## You Be the Judge

As a Supreme Court Justice, Amy Coney Barrett conducts rigorous research and legal analysis in order to apply the law fairly in the court cases she hears. Now that you've read about Amy Coney Barrett, how would you decide on the following questions? Vote Yay or Nay.

1

Amy Coney Barrett was born and raised outside New Orleans, Louisiana.

YAY

NAY

2

Amy Coney Barrett worked as a law professor at Rhodes College in Tennessee.

YAY

NAY

3

Amy and her husband Jesse have seven children, including two children they adopted from Jamaica.

YAY

NAY

4

Amy was deeply influenced by Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia.

YAY

NAY

5

Amy is an originalist, meaning that she applies her own original ideas to every case she hears.

YAY

NAY

6

President Donald J. Trump nominated Amy for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit, and three years later, for the Supreme Court.

YAY

NAY

# Word Search

ORIGINALIST  
PROFESSOR  
JUDGE  
SUPREME COURT  
CONSTITUTION  
DISSENT  
DUE PROCESS  
MOTHER  
LOUISIANA  
CATHOLIC  
CONSERVATIVE  
SCALIA

C O N S E R V A T I V E L V V K  
Y M O P L J Y C Q R P R M L D L  
T Q I J M P D W A R M P Z O M L  
A R T K P Z W U J T W N R X D N  
N P U V B L K X E R H I P J J N  
A V T O N R G M Z P G O W N T T  
I Z I L C B O M D I R J L Y K R  
S D T M X E G S N I S O U I Z T  
I M S L O X M A S D S C C D C Q  
U N N T R T L E K E N S A E G X  
O Y O R V I H L R J F W E L S E  
L K C M S T J E Y P T O G N I S  
D Q P T L Q B P R Q U J R Y T A  
W T R N N R J M M G N S D P B R

## Order in the Court! Word Ladder

To change the word JUDGE into the word LEGAL, move from top to bottom to form a sequence of words. On every step of the ladder change each word by replacing one letter of the word. You can change the order of the letters. Use the clues to help you!



1	J U D G E	A public official who hears and decides cases brought in court
2	□ □ □ □ □	One who serves as a model for others
3	□ □ □ □ □	Strongly encouraged in a way that shows that you believe something is very important
4	□ □ □ □ □	To quarrel
5	□ □ □ □ □	Great in size or amount
6	L E G A L	Of or relating to the law

Answer key on page 10



# Glossary

- **Conservative:** One favoring traditional views and values.
- **Dissenting:** Differing in opinion, especially from the majority.
- **Due Process:** An established course for judicial proceedings designed to protect the legal rights of the individual.
- **Felony:** A serious crime like murder or robbery, punishable by a severe sentence, such as imprisonment for more than a year.
- **Judiciary:** A system of courts of law for the administration of justice.
- **Originalist:** One who believes that the U.S. Constitution should be interpreted based on the authors' intent at the time it was adopted.
- **Prominent:** Widely and popularly known.
- **Quorum:** The minimal number of members of a group or organization, who must be present to transact business legally.

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YOU BE THE JUDGE KEY: 1-Y, 2-N, 3-N, 4-Y, 5-N, 6-Y, ORDER IN THE COURT KEY: 1-JUDGE, 2-GUIDE, 3-URGED, 4-ARGUE, 5-LARGE, 6-LEGAL.