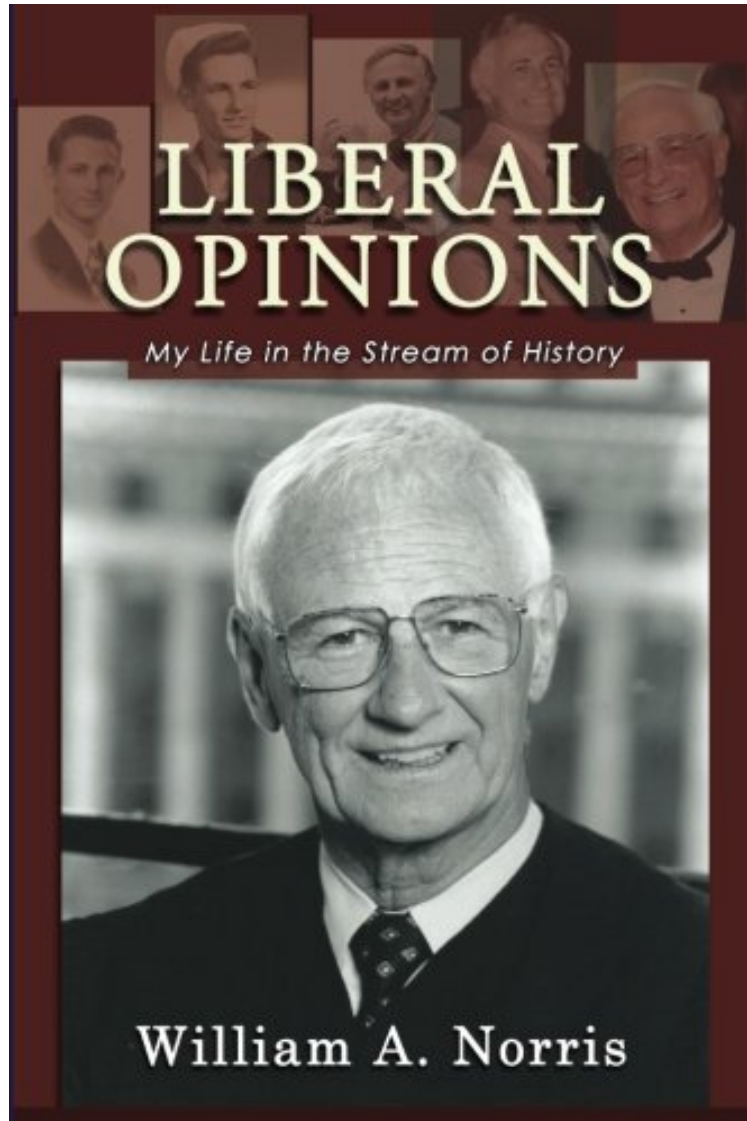


## Liberal Opinions: My Life in the Stream of History

*William A. Norris*

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**William A. Norris : Liberal Opinions: My Life in the Stream of History** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Liberal Opinions: My Life in the Stream of History:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. because he would have been great at it)By CB RosenbergBill Norris's very well-written and important memoir can be read on many levels. On one, it's the remembrances of a man who was an important lawyer in up-and-coming Los Angeles from the mid-1950s, when Los Angeles was blossoming into a world city, to the early 1980s a time when he was a key partner in building what became one of the City's important law firms at the time. On another level, it's the memoir of a civic activist, key to or heavily involved in

important parts of the City's civic life, whether serving as chair of the Police Commission when reform of the LAPD was much in the news, or helping lead the charge to start, from scratch, the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA). And if those accomplishments weren't enough, during the same period he was heavily involved in the political life of the City and the State, whether helping Tom Bradley get elected as the first African-American mayor of Los Angeles, serving on the State Board of Education or running for attorney general of California (sadly, he was defeated, because he would have been great at it). In 1980, he was appointed by President Carter to a judgeship on the United States Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit, where he continued to push the law in progressive ways. That included writing a concurring opinion in 1989 in *Watkins vs U.S. Army*, a case in which the 9th Circuit reversed the army's refusal to re-enlist a gay soldier who had served with honor merely because he was gay. Without getting too deeply into the legal weeds (well, OK, just a little), the majority based its ruling on the ground of equitable estoppel. Judge Norris's concurrence argued that the reinstatement of the soldier should instead be based on the government's violation of the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment, a much broader approach. Although that argument didn't carry the day with the majority in *Watkins* in 1989, it became an important argument in support of gay rights later on, including in Justice O'Connor's concurrence in the Supreme Court's 2002 decision in *Lawrence v. Texas*, a case which unlocked the door to the still-developing path to legal equality for gays. But there's a coda. After more seventeen years on the bench, Judge Norris retired from the 9th Circuit, returned to the active practice of law and went on to build the appellate department of a major national law firm. Most lawyers would be satisfied with having accomplished only one of Judge Norris's important career achievements. But somehow, he did them all. Full disclosure: I was one of the young lawyers (now, these many years later, not so young) whom Bill Norris helped recruit to Tuttle and Taylor, his law firm at the time, and I'm briefly mentioned in the book. One of the things the Bill talks about is how hard he worked to mentor those young lawyers and give them the opportunity to shine (or try to). He was amazing in that regard. I recall with some amusement that when I was a young lawyer on the Stanford University case that's described in the book (where the University successfully stripped tenure from a faculty member for his alleged behavior during violent student protests that swept the campus), I told Bill that I thought the then-president of Stanford, Dick Lyman was, for a variety of reasons, on the wrong track in pursuing the matter at all. Bill said, Well, I think he should hear those arguments directly from you. We then flew up to Palo Alto so that I, a first year associate, could tell the sitting president of Stanford that he was barking up the wrong tree. President Lyman listened politely to my arguments, quietly demurred and went on to pursue his chosen course. When, later I became a partner myself at Tuttle Taylor, I sometimes asked myself whether I would have proffered such an opportunity to so young an associate in a major case. I kind of doubt it. But, then, Bill was, and is, different. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. And well loved. Because one must love the world to insist ... By Lesley In these fractious, bitter times it's an extraordinary breath of fresh air to read Judge Norris' memoir. His is a life genuinely -- and generously -- well lived. And well loved. Because one must love the world to insist upon justice and compassion and equality for all to live and love as they choose. And whom they choose. It's not a sentimental memoir but it is a romance all the same. A passionate engagement with life, beauty, art, ideas. And justice fought for and won -- not for power or might but so that good is enabled and the vulnerable are protected. For this legacy, one can only say thank you. At a time when hatred and violence are coursing through our body politic, this memoir was an antidote. And for this too, I say thank you. For anyone who interested in a life committed to our civic good (especially at a time when it's being ripped apart!), this is a terrific book to read. It's also a wonderful book for young people to read. In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson "Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail." That is what Judge Norris has done and his book is a Baedeker for others to follow. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. I found the rich history backdrop that so defined the times in which Bill did his great work to be particularly important. By M. Mack I finished this memoir pre-election and am writing this review post-election..... so I cannot deny that the results are influencing my feelings regarding just about anything I write these days relative to the state of our nation and its heroes, and Bill is to be included in that hero group in my opinion. I know Bill, primarily through his family, and have had the opportunity to sit with him a few times over the past 10 years in various situations and found myself engaged in conversations compelling and close to my own heart about the state of our nation and its citizens. Having come of age and grown older during the time of this memoir, I found the rich history backdrop that so defined the times in which Bill did his great work to be particularly important, especially at a time when we appear once again to be dealing with things that I long ago thought had disappeared from our national psyche. As a former law student who never made it past the first year of law school, the study and beauty of the law so aptly described by Bill in forming his opinions drew me in, as did the importance of those decisions he influenced during my lifetime. I really enjoyed this memoir.....felt like I was back on the sofa chatting with Bill. And I learned a lot of new things as well. I would have loved having this man on our Supreme Court.

Author of the controversial but prescient judicial opinion striking down the ban on gays in the military two decades before the Supreme Court finally recognized such equal rights Judge Bill Norris made law and waves on the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. Yet his legal and civic life before and after, though less well known, is equally the measure

of the man. Bill Norris tells his American story growing up in Turtle Creek, Pennsylvania, then rising to legal, judicial and political heights in post-war California. His zest for life comes off every page as he fights discrimination, renders justice and inspires a host of brilliant attorneys. His prose is crisp and fast-paced. His America: uncommonly decent. Edmund Gerald Jerry Brown Jr., Governor of California A truly compelling story of an amazing man. Bill Norris memoir is a beautifully written account of a man who rose to the top of the legal world and was an integral part of some of the most important issues of the last half century. Most of all, it is an inspiring book that is a powerful reminder of how much one person can accomplish. Erwin Chemerinsky, Dean and Raymond Pryke Professor of First Amendment Law, University of California, Irvine School of Law Recounted in this remarkable book is a conversation Bill Norris had with Justice White following his opinion for the Supreme Court in *Bowers v. Hardwick*, upholding Georgias sodomy law. Shortly after, Justice White visited the Ninth Circuit Judicial Conference and Bill confronted him about the injustice of the decision. I witnessed the interaction. No one else was bold enough to challenge the Justice, though others harbored the same doubts. Justice White shrugged off Bills concerns as trivial, but Bill stood firm and I could see from his tone and look that he would have none of it. Soon, Bill set about undermining *Bowers* with his brilliant opinion in the *Perry Watkins* case. The theory in *Watkins* resulted, a decade and a half later, in the overruling of *Bowers* and, eventually, to marriage equality. This story, among many others, makes this personal history a gripping and fulfilling read. Alex Kozinski, Judge, United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit *Liberal Opinions* traces William Norris journey from a small Pennsylvania town to influential Los Angeles civic leader and co-founder of the Museum of Contemporary Art to the Ninth Circuit Court bench. With candor and deep reflection, Norris shares the personal stories and principles that helped propel him from humble beginnings to becoming a leading liberal voice for our country. Eli Broad, philanthropist and founding chairman of MOCA When it comes to MOCA, this is a story at the edge of Hollywood drama and true philanthropy, and civic engagement and true commitment to the art. MOCAs conception is the living proof that art, contemporary art, risk taking, and commitment to aesthetic experimentations are a key component of civic, courageous urban development. And because we are in Los Angeles, it had to be a good story fueled with drama! Philippe Vergne, Director, The Museum of Contemporary Art These are the life and times of a trailblazing lawyer and judge in the American law. An important addition to the *Journeys Memoirs Series* from the indie academic publisher Quid Pro Books, New Orleans, Louisiana.

About the Author William A. Norris has been a practicing lawyer, political adviser and candidate, family man, naval corpsman, and most famously Ninth Circuit judge. He was born in Turtle Creek, Pennsylvania, and has long made Los Angeles his home with his wife Jane Jelenko.