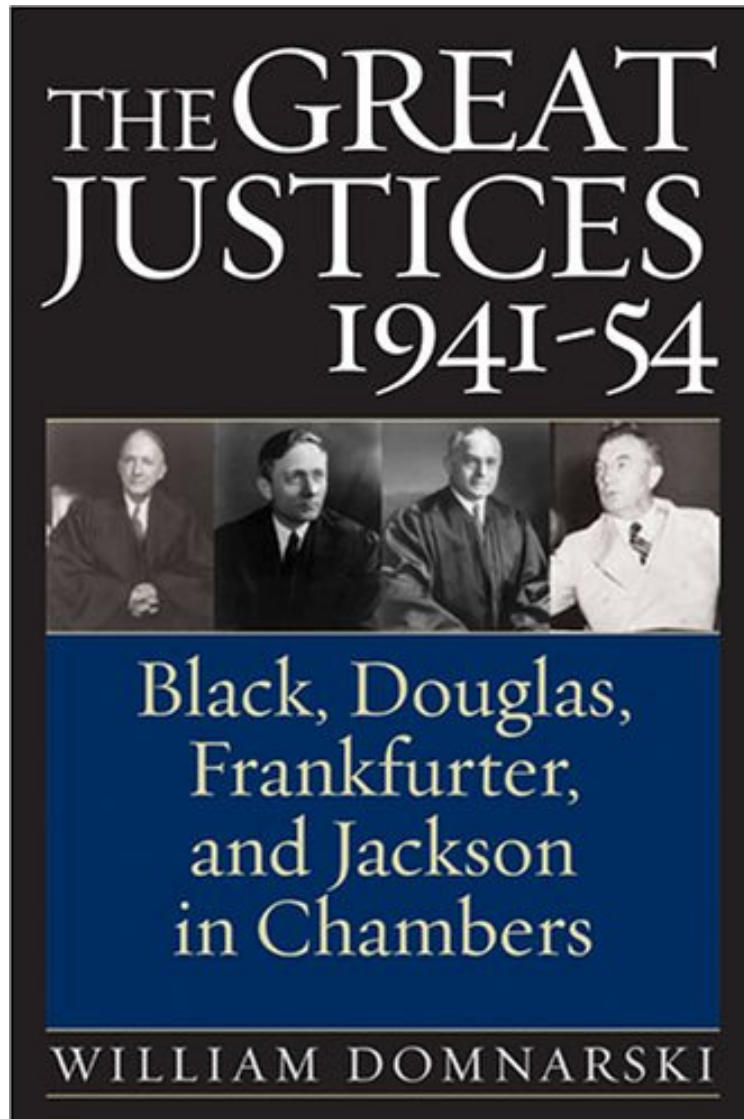


## The Great Justices, 1941-54: Black, Douglas, Frankfurter, and Jackson in Chambers

*William Domnarski*

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**William Domnarski : The Great Justices, 1941-54: Black, Douglas, Frankfurter, and Jackson in Chambers** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Great Justices, 1941-54: Black, Douglas, Frankfurter, and Jackson in Chambers:

2 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Stars in ChambersBy Christian SchlectA short book that falls between pure court history and pure judicial biography. It is for readers deeply interested in the U.S. Supreme Court as

an institution, and highlights four famous justices as they interacted in a period now over a half-century past. Using this time and these justices, William Domnarski gives his view on how the high court really works. Douglas is given the highest marks, with Black, Frankfurter, and Jackson all found wanting in balance. The degree of national elective office political ambition alive then on the court will be a surprise to those more familiar with present day standards--as will the degree of animosity amongst the Brethren. While good for anyone in the legal or political science professions, I think most general readers will find this book a journey too deep into an ocean of past constitutional and personal battles. 9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Quite Interesting Portraits of Four Important Justices By Ronald H. Clark This book is comprised of profiles of four leading Supreme Court Justices during the (roughly) 1940's through 1970's period. The author suggests he is dissatisfied with judicial biographies because they do not focus on the "dual nature" of the Court--i.e., the Court speaking through not only majority opinions but also via the individual justices involved in contributing to its opinions. Instead, the author posits the idea of "assessment-seeking judicial profiles" as a superior technique. The author's approach is highly biographical, with some attention to substantive legal developments, and heavy emphasis is placed upon patterns of interaction, agreement, and dissent. Each profile runs around 40 pages. Domnarski pays particular attention to the language of opinions, a task for which he is eminently qualified given his previous important work, "In the Opinion of the Court," which analyzed opinion patterns. I found that this perspective added considerable value to his discussion. After all, opinions are more than just words, but constitute attempts at persuasion and justification as well as explanation. The profiles vary in quality and impact. One problem is that so much has been written already about Black, Frankfurter, and Douglas. As a result, I found the Black and Frankfurter profiles, while interesting, did not provide new information or perspectives on the Justices. The profile of Robert Jackson, however, is quite impressive, since so little real analysis of Jackson has been written. Students of Jackson await the promised new biography of him by John Q. Barrett since a suitable judicial biography has been lacking up to this point. Domnarski has dug deeply in the record and produced quite a perceptive portrait of Jackson, though one that is perhaps too critical. It is hard to believe that Jackson became much more conservative and combative (as to Black and Douglas) after he was passed over by Truman to be Chief Justice and that this affected his voting patterns. We shall have to await Barrett's analysis to consider this thesis. I found the strongest profile to be, surprisingly, that of William O. Douglas. Here the author had to face the problem of so much already having been written on WOD. Nonetheless, he has produced one of the most interesting discussions of Douglas that I am aware has appeared anywhere. His reliance upon the Douglas/Walter Murphy oral history interviews, done in the early 1960's, is highly effective; it is delightful to discover that all these transcripts are available on the internet. While Douglas certainly had his shortcomings, he stands pretty tall after Domnarski's analysis. The research is quite solid; the notes extensive; an appendix of voting agreement/disagreement statistics is helpful as well. I think the principal value of the book is for those not familiar with the existing literature on the four justices, because each study packs a lot of information and understanding into a relatively brief amount of space. But even experienced Court watchers can benefit from the author's perceptive discussion of Douglas and especially his suggestive analysis of Jackson.

The Great Justices offers a revealing glimpse of a judicial universe in which titanic egos often clash, and comes as close as any book ever has to getting inside the minds of Supreme Court jurists. This is rare and little-examined territory: in the public consciousness the Supreme Court is usually seen as an establishment whose main actors, the justices, remain above emotion, vitriol, and gossip, the better to interpret our nation of laws. Yet the Court's work is always an interchange of ideas and individuals, and the men and women who make up the Court, despite or because of their best intentions, are as human as the rest of us. Appreciating that human dimension helps us to discover some of the Court's secrets, and a new way to understand the Court and its role. Comparing four brilliant but very different jurists of the Roosevelt Court--Hugo Black, William O. Douglas, Felix Frankfurter, and Robert Jackson--William Domnarski paints a startling picture of the often deeply ambiguous relationship between ideas and reality, between the law and the justices who interpret and create it. By pulling aside the veil of decorous tradition, Domnarski brings to light the personalities that shaped one of the greatest Courts of our time--one whose decisions continue to affect judicial thinking today. William Domnarski is the author of *In the Opinion of the Court* (1996), a study of the history and nature of federal court judicial opinions. He holds a J.D. from the University of Connecticut and a Ph.D. in English from the University of California. Domnarski currently practices law in California, where he is also working on a forthcoming biography of legendary Hollywood lawyer Bert Fields.

About the Author William Domnarski is a practicing intellectual property attorney in Riverside, California and author of *In the Opinion of the Court*, an analysis of the relationship between style and substance in Supreme Court opinions.