

J. PAUL OETKEN

b. October 1, 1965

FIRST OUT MALE FEDERAL JUDGE

“Moderation and judicial modesty are crucial characteristics of a judge.”

He is the first openly gay man to serve as a federal judge.

J. Paul Oetken is the judge for the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York. He is the first openly gay man to be confirmed as a federal judge.

Oetken grew up in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. His leadership skills and talent for oration began early. When Oetken was in high school, the National Council on Youth Leadership named him “Youth Leader of the Year.” He also won the school’s mock Democratic presidential convention, playing the role of Senator Alan Cranston.

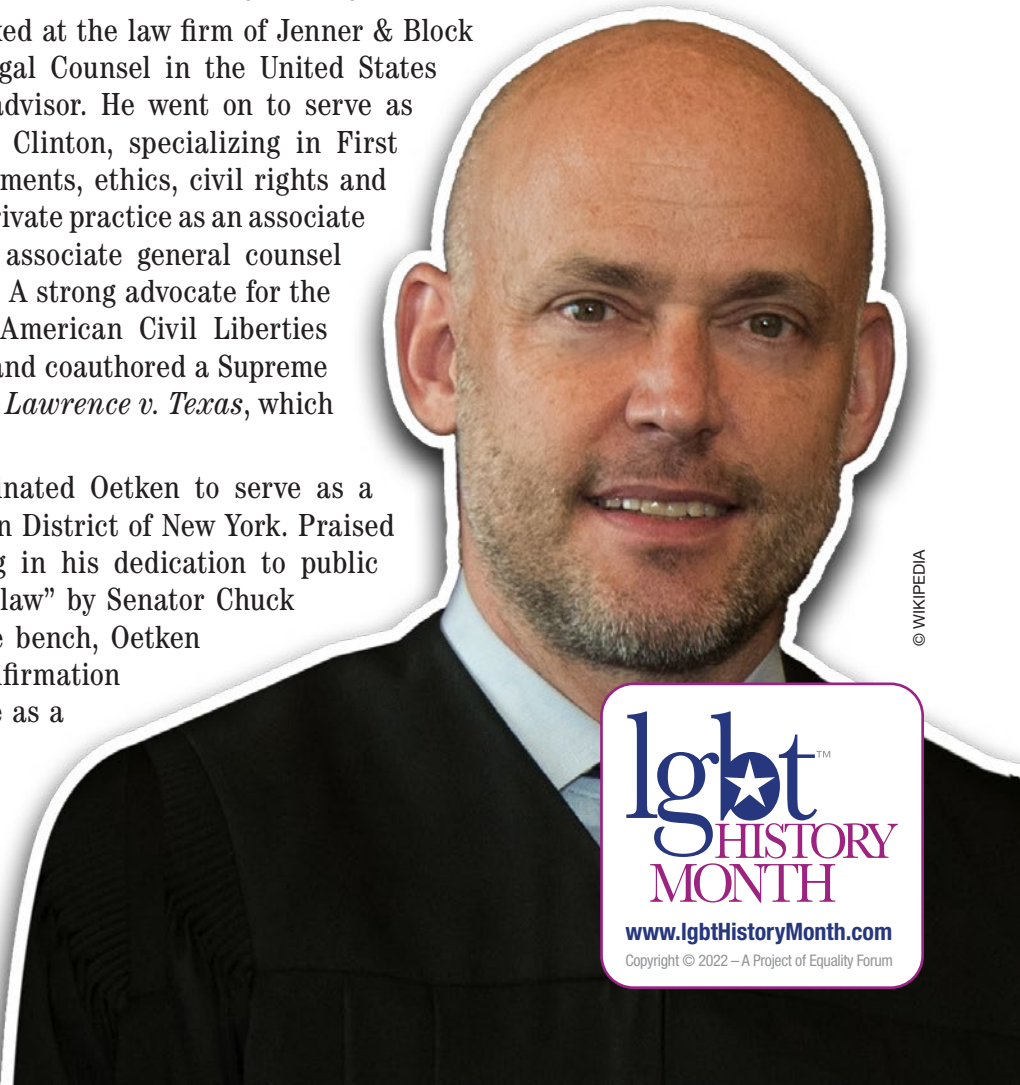
Oetken graduated with distinction from the University of Iowa and earned his law degree from Yale Law School in 1991. At a time when there were few openly gay students, Oetken came out on his résumé as a part of the LGBT Law Students Association at Yale.

After law school, Oetken clerked for three renowned federal judges: Richard Cudahy on the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals, Louis Oberdorfer on the District Court for the District of Columbia, and Harry Blackmun on the U.S. Supreme Court. While clerking for Justice Blackmun, Oetken closely watched the confirmation of Deborah Batts, the first openly LGBTQ federal judge. The experience taught him that being openly gay and being a judge were not mutually exclusive. It confirmed his aspiration to one day to join the judiciary.

After his clerkships, Oetken briefly worked at the law firm of Jenner & Block before leaving to join the Office of Legal Counsel in the United States Department of Justice as an attorney-advisor. He went on to serve as an associate counsel to President Bill Clinton, specializing in First Amendment issues, presidential appointments, ethics, civil rights and legal policy. He subsequently worked in private practice as an associate at Debevoise & Plimpton and later as associate general counsel and senior vice president at Cablevision. A strong advocate for the LGBTQ community, he supported the American Civil Liberties Union LGBT Project and Lambda Legal and coauthored a Supreme Court amicus brief in the landmark case *Lawrence v. Texas*, which struck down the state’s sodomy law.

In 2011 President Barack Obama nominated Oetken to serve as a federal judge in the prestigious Southern District of New York. Praised as “brilliant, well rounded, unwavering in his dedication to public service and his commitment to rule of law” by Senator Chuck Schumer, who recommended him to the bench, Oetken was confirmed by a vote of 80-13. The confirmation made him the first out gay man to serve as a federal judge.

Oetken lives with his husband, Makky Pratayot, in Manhattan.



© WIKIPEDIA

lgbt[™]
HISTORY
MONTH

www.lgbtHistoryMonth.com

Copyright © 2022 – A Project of Equality Forum