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STANDARD
JUDICIAL DEVIATION
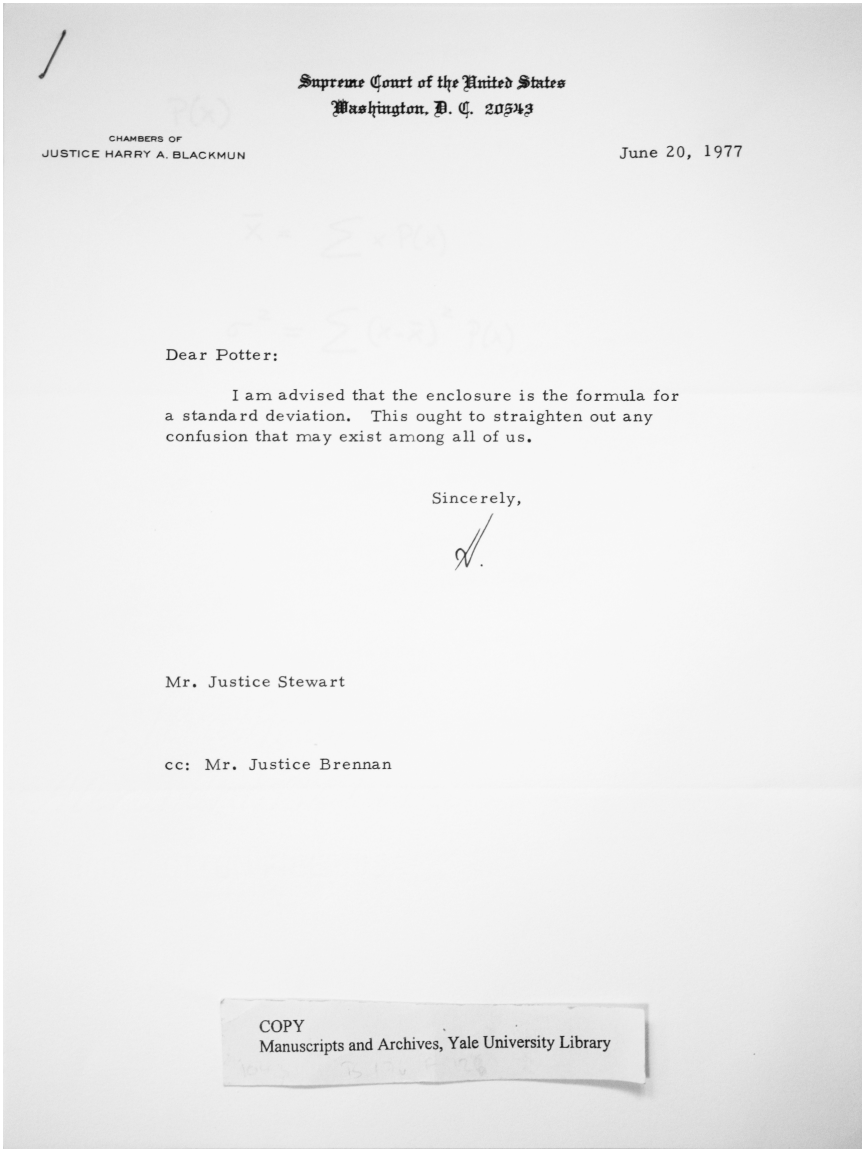
AS OF JUNE 20, 1977

Harry A. Blackmun

We have no idea what kind of weighty, strenuous debates or other goings-on within the U.S. Supreme Court prompted Justice Harry Blackmun (baccalaureate degree in mathematics from Harvard, 1929) to write as he did to Justice Potter Stewart (baccalaureate degree in English literature from Yale, 1937). We suspect, however, that there was a strain of humor in Blackmun's message. His attention to "the so-called standard deviation" (*Colgrove v. Battin*, 413 U.S. 149, 167 n.1 (1973) (Marshall, J., dissenting, joined by Stewart, J.), was almost unprecedented at the Court, "standard" and "deviation" having appeared next to each other only once in the *U.S. Reports* before 1977. *See id*. But 1977 was a big year for standard deviation at the Court. "Standard deviation" was mentioned without a "so-called" in *Hazelwood School District v. United States*, 433 U.S. 299, 308 n.14 (1977) (opinion of the Court by Stewart, J.), perhaps because another opinion earlier that year contained a nifty little description of the calculation of a standard deviation. *Castaneda v. Partida*, 430 U.S. 482, 496 n.17 (1977) (opinion for the Court by Blackmun, J.).

— *The Editors*

When he wrote this note, Harry A. Blackmun (1908-1999) was an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States.

Supreme Court of the United States
Washington, D. C. 20543

CHAMBERS OF
JUSTICE HARRY A. BLACKMUN

June 20, 1977

Dear Potter:

I am advised that the enclosure is the formula for a standard deviation. This ought to straighten out any confusion that may exist among all of us.

Sincerely,

Mr. Justice Stewart

cc: Mr. Justice Brennan

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Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library

Harry A. Blackman to Potter Stewart (June 20, 1977) Potter Stewart Papers, Box 578, Yale University Library, Manuscripts and Archives.

$$P(x)$$

$$\bar{x} = \sum x \, P(x)$$

$$\sigma^2 = \sum (x - \bar{x})^2 \, P(x)$$

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