

## JUDGE STEVENS OF NEW YORK

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Justice Harold A. Stevens is the first Negro ever to become a member of the New York Supreme court. Now 48, he was appointed last July by Governor Averell Harriman to fill a vacancy caused by death. Then, in November, he was elected to serve for the full 14-year term.

Many honors have come to Justice Stevens as a result of his elevation to his state's highest tribunal. Despite this, he still singles out a much earlier event in his life as of greater personal significance: his entrance into Boston College Law school. He was the first Negro to be enrolled there. For although he is deeply conscious of the secular importance of his duties on the bench, he knows that his whole philosophy of life has been shaped by his religion. He became a Catholic shortly after he completed his legal training, 20 years ago.

His interest in the Church had been stimulated and nourished, of course, by classroom and campus discussions at Boston college. "I think I knew all along that I would become a Catholic," he says, looking back on his law-school days. Still, for the stepson of a Methodist minister it must have been a momentous decision.

It was, ironically, the death of his mother that brought about Stevens' entrance into the Jesuit college. After his graduation from Benedict college in Columbia, S.C., he headed for Massachusetts to study law at Boston University, a Methodist institution. But his mother's death made it necessary to postpone his studies for a year, to help out at home.

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During that year he somehow became curious about Catholicism. After studying the Church, he became convinced that it offered something "mentally and spiritually good." His studies met with no opposition from his minister stepfather. When Harold resumed his education the following year, it was at the Catholic law school.

It should not be inferred, from the fact that he was the first Negro to enroll there, that the college had previously been barring Negroes, Justice Stevens points out. It was only that in the early '30's there were relatively few Negro Catholics, and of those the number training to be lawyers was negligible.

"Those years at Boston college were among the most enjoyable years of my life," he says. The handsome, mild-mannered young man won respect and affection from his classmates. In his junior year, they named him class vice president. But although these years were enjoyable, they were hardly carefree. He had very little money, and had to maintain a brutally rigorous schedule. He worked as a bellhop in Brookline hotels during the winter and at New Jersey resorts in the summer.

"I usually began my job at 6:30 A.M., worked until 4, and then attended classes from 6 to 9 or 10 at night," he relates. After that, he'd get out the law books. Many a night, his head never touched the pillow.

After graduation, Stevens went to New York. There he took instructions and was shortly received into the Church. At the same time, he was preparing for the bar examination by studying New York city's code system.

He served his clerk apprenticeship under Assemblyman William T. Andrews, and became his partner in 1938, when he passed the bar

examination. He remained with Andrews until the outbreak of the 2nd World War. Then he went into the army as a cavalry sergeant.

The launching of his legal career was only one of the important steps Stevens took in 1938. On Christmas day of that year, he married his childhood sweetheart, Ella Myers. Ella had been attending the University of Chicago and doing social work. Later, while Harold was in the army, she took instructions in the Catholic faith. One of the happiest days of his life, he says, was the day she told him that she, too, had become a Catholic.

Following his discharge from the army, Stevens formed successive law partnerships in New York, with Thomas Dyett and with Matthew H. Brandenburg. He served as assemblyman from the 13th district, and in 1950 was elected a judge of Manhattan's General Sessions (criminal) court.

From the time of his reception into the Church, he had assumed a vigorous role in Catholic affairs. In 1936 he began working with the Catholic Interracial council, founded by Father John LaFarge two years earlier to strive for social justice for all minorities, particularly for Negroes.

"The focal point of our early endeavors was within the Church itself," Stevens recalls. "We concentrated on attempting to correct conditions in some of our parochial schools and Catholic colleges where Negroes were not being accepted."

Stevens was president of the council for two years, and is now a member of its speakers' bureau and its board of directors. He also has found time to teach labor law for the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists, an organization founded by Father John Monahan. He

conducted classes in St. Mark's parish hall in Harlem for nearly four years, and at Cardinal Hayes High school for two years. He has served as special counsel for several organizations: the President's Committee on Fair Employment Practices in the Railway Firemen's hearings; the committee to organize Negro locomotive firemen; and the Brotherhood of Sleeping-Car Porters.

Honors have clustered upon him over the years. Most memorable, perhaps, was the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice medal, awarded by Pope Pius XII and presented to Stevens by Cardinal Spellman in a ceremony at St. Patrick's cathedral one Sunday morning in 1953.

He has received honorary doctorates from Fordham, Boston College, and Benedict College, and holds the Phi Beta Sigma achievement award. He is a governor of the Guild of Catholic Lawyers, a trustee of the Grand Street Boys' association, and a member of the archdiocesan CYO board of governors.

He and Ella now live on Convent Ave. in the Bronx. Occasionally, they find enough time between Stevens' multitudinous duties to take a fishing trip together. The judge also hugely enjoys professional football and baseball. Although the court sits most of the time in Manhattan, last September he was presiding in the Bronx county court house during World Series time. His chambers overlooked Yankee stadium during those epic days. "And I'm a Dodger fan," he says, with that serene smile currently worn by Dodger fans everywhere.

People who have worked with Stevens assert that he is likely to become one of the most distinguished judges in New York history. They base their prediction not only on his manifest professional ability but on the depth of his passion for equity and truth. No man in public life, they will tell you, is more steadily conscious of the fact that the Sermon on the Mount is the greatest repository of the principles of justice.