

EARL WARREN, 1891-1974

"Perhaps the most lonesome day . . . was the day I arrived at the Supreme Court."

After his retirement, Earl Warren reflected on his 16 years at the Supreme Court in a conversation with historian Abram Sachar, nationally televised by the Public Broadcasting Service. Their talk excerpted below was taped at Boston's WGBH on May 3, 1972, when the former Chief Justice received the Saul and Minna Dretzin Prize for distinguished contribution to contemporary life.

Q: You were in the political world; you were the governor of California, even though it was a bipartisan nomination—both the Democrats and Republicans wanted you there.

A: They did that once — only once.

Q: And then you were part of the national ticket with Tom Dewey, running for the vice presidency. From that political world, with all of its turbulence, you move into the Supreme Court as the chief justice and divest yourself completely, not only in actuality but in mode of thinking, of any political involvement. What kind of a psychological readjustment did that require of you, especially at the beginning?

A: Well, it was the most difficult adjustment I had ever made in my life, before or since. I've always thought that perhaps the most lonesome day I ever had in my life was the day I arrived at the Supreme Court. I had been told by the President four days before he appointed me that he was going to appoint me, and he told me that he felt that it was necessary for his appointee to be there on the opening day of the term, the first Monday in October. And he asked me if I could come by that time and I said, "Well, it isn't exactly the way a governor would like to leave his administration after almost 11 years, to get up and leave in four days, but, Mr. President, if it has to be done it

can be done, and I will be there." "Well," he said, "I have talked to some of the senior members of the court and they have told me that there are important cases on the calendar that call for a full court." And he said, "I would like to see you there if you accept it," and I said, "I will be there."

So I was there on Monday morning, I walked in about 10 o'clock in the morning, and court didn't convene then until noon, and so I walked into the office of the chief justice and there was Mrs. McHugh, who had been the secretary for Chief Justice Vinson, and there were three law clerks, one of whom had been with Chief Justice Vinson for one year, and two he had employed but had not yet seen because the court term hadn't opened. And there were two old messengers there. And that was my staff, that's all there was, and here I came on four days' notice, with no preparation and no knowledge of anything that was in the court at that time—some 400 cases that had come in during the summer months, don't you know. And to make the adjustment to the Supreme Court from what I had done before was really an adjustment.

Q: That was mainly a physical readjustment, but the psychological readjustment of moving out of political thinking into an objectivity that is Olympian. . . . How did you adjust to the serenity and the Shangri-la atmosphere of the court after being in politics so long?

A: Well, serenity was something I didn't have to get along with for very long be-