



The Per Niente

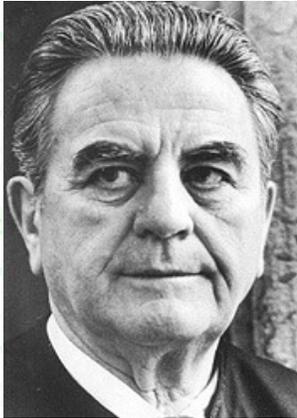


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Judge John Sirica

Born March 19, 1904, in Waterbury, Conn., John Joseph Sirica was the son of an Italian immigrant father and a second-generation Italian American mother. When he was 6 or 7, the struggling family, searching for a better life, set out on an odyssey that brought them in 1918 to Washington.

They settled in a two-room flat above a shoemaker's shop on D Street NW, and

Sirica worked as a trash collector's helper. The job made him responsive to his father's urgings about going to school.

He enrolled in night classes at Emerson Preparatory School, then transferred to Columbia Preparatory School. In 1921 he graduated with what he later said was the equivalent of two or three years of high school.

It was possible then to go directly from high school into law school, and Sirica enrolled first at George Washington University Law School, then at Georgetown University. He dropped out of each after a month, but in January 1923, he returned to Georgetown and stuck with it.

Having learned to box at the YMCA, he paid expenses by teaching boxing and acting as a physical education instructor at a gym, where he met men who would help him later in his career.

Finishing law school in June 1926, he took the bar exam, but certain that he had failed, he went to Miami to join his family. In mid-July he won a 10-round professional bout there, but he learned about that time that he had passed the bar exam.

Returning to Washington, he was turned down by the city's major law firms, but he finally joined a small firm practicing criminal law.

Sirica lost the first 13 court-assigned felony cases he tried. Once, in exasperation, he punched a vice squad policeman during an argument in the prosecutor's office. When an old sparring partner, Leo Rover, became U.S. attorney in Washington during the Hoover administration, Sirica joined his staff.

Sirica said in a prologue to his book that he "never forgot" the favor the Republicans had done him. In 1934, figuring the Democrats would soon replace Rover, Sirica left to begin 15 years largely spent in private practice that he later described as "my starvation period."

Briefly he tried his hand at promoting prize fights. The venture flopped, but he formed a fast friendship with former heavyweight champion Jack Dempsey. During World War II, the two toured the country selling government savings bonds, and when Sirica married in 1952, Dempsey was his best man.

Sirica became increasingly active in the Republican Party, making speeches before Italian American voters during presidential campaigns. He was counsel to several congressional committees. In 1949, Hogan and Hartson, seeking a lawyer with trial experience, hired him. Eventually he headed the firm's trial section.

In 1957, a vacancy arose on the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, and Sirica called in some chits. On April 2, 1957, he was sworn in as a federal judge.

Once on the bench, Sirica developed a reputation as an outspoken, unpredictable judge. Reporters gave him the nickname "Maximum John" because of his stiff sentences. He was re-

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