

This Day in History... February 5, 1900

Birth of Adlai Stevenson II

Adlai Stevenson II was born on February 5, 1900, in Los Angeles, California.

Stevenson came from a prominent political family. His grandfather, Adlai Stevenson I, had served as vice president under Grover Cleveland. One of his uncles had been a friend and campaign manager for Abraham Lincoln, and his father had been Secretary of State of Illinois.

In high school, Stevenson was an active student, playing on the tennis team, acting in the theater, and serving as editor-in-chief of the school newspaper. After graduation, he enlisted in the Navy, but didn't finish his training until it was too late for him to join in World War I. From there Stevenson went on to Princeton, where he was again editor of the newspaper and a member of several clubs. Stevenson earned a degree in literature and history, and at his father's request, went to Harvard Law School. However, he was bored with law and eventually left the school.



Stamp issued just three months after Stevenson's death.



From the 1930s Celebrate the Century sheet

After leaving Harvard, Stevenson worked for the newspaper his family owned in Illinois, the *Bloomington Daily Pantagraph*. Within a year of leaving Harvard, Stevenson found a renewed interest in law after talking to Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. So he finished his law degree at Northwestern University and opened a practice in Chicago.

In 1933, Stevenson took his first public office, serving as special counsel to the Agricultural Adjustment Commission, one of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal Programs. With the repeal of prohibition later that year, Stevenson then became chief attorney for the Federal Alcohol Control Administration.

Stevenson then returned to his law practice before serving as chairman of the Chicago Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies. In that role he raised support and money for the Allies fighting against Nazi Germany. During World War II, Stevenson served as special assistant to the secretary of the Navy and led a mission on policies for the occupation of Italy. After the war, he was an alternative delegate to the United Nations.

Stevenson was elected governor of Illinois in 1948. During his four-year term, he accomplished a great deal, including changes to state police hiring and operations, fought illegal gambling, instituted highway improvements and passed welfare legislation. His popularity made him an obvious choice for the Democratic Presidential nomination in 1952, but he refused to campaign. During the campaign, Stevenson became known for his intelligent, high-quality speeches. He was nominated anyway, but was unsuccessful in the election. Stevenson was nominated again in 1956, but was defeated again by Dwight D. Eisenhower.



This stamp was issued on Eisenhower's 79th birthday.



From the Prominent Americans Series

Stevenson became a prominent public speaker and supporter of the Democratic Party. During the national convention in 1960, he secretly sought the nomination once again, but lost to Senator John Kennedy. After the convention, Stevenson used his speaking talent to campaign for Kennedy. When JFK won the election, he asked Stevenson if he would like to be ambassador to Britain, attorney general, or ambassador to the United Nations. The statesman chose the last option.

Stevenson supported US foreign policy, though he sometimes disagreed with Kennedy's plans. Stevenson was not briefed on the Bay of Pigs Invasion and lost credibility when he insisted the US was not behind it. After Kennedy was assassinated, Stevenson continued in his role as UN ambassador during Johnson's administration.

In 1965, Stevenson went to Geneva, Switzerland, for the annual meeting of the UN Economic and Social Council. After the conference he went to London to meet with the British prime minister. While walking the streets of London on July 14, he suffered a heart attack and died later that day.



Issued to commemorate the 1945 UN Peace Conference.

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