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## C. William O'Neill

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## C. WILLIAM O'NEILL

*Oliver C. Schroeder\**

The public career of C. William O'Neill has been widely recognized. He may be the only person in American history to have filled the top position in each branch of state government: Speaker of the House of Representatives, Governor, and Chief Justice. His leadership in each office provided Ohio with progress in justice. As Chief Justice he gave life to the Modern Courts Amendment to the state constitution. In 1953 as Attorney General, he proposed and successfully urged adoption of a vigorous drug abuse control statute, a pioneer piece of legislation for state governments. And as the youngest Speaker of the House of Representatives in Ohio's history, he became a model for young people and encouraged them to actively participate in government.

In addition to this public career, Bill O'Neill committed himself to teaching law and government. At both Marietta and Bethany Colleges, he taught political science; at Ohio State he taught law. In 1973, he was elected to Case Western Reserve's Society of Benchers as a public member, one of only ten such persons in the Society's seventeen year history.

Chief Justice O'Neill's teaching efforts affected several other areas. First, he habitually surrounded himself in all his various legal activities, public and private, with eager young men and women. He assumed they would perform and gave them responsibilities. He manifested his faith in each colleague. This process of law office education was particularly prominent during his state Attorney General tenure (1951-57). It continued during his term as Governor (1957-58). Today throughout Ohio are distinguished judges and practitioners who benefited from O'Neill's training.

Second—especially during his tenure as Chief Justice—O'Neill instructed the many participants in Ohio's judicial administration system. Under his leadership the supreme court invoked the Rules of Superintendence for all Ohio courts. Judges

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were taught the contemporary needs for speedy trials, efficient court administration, and expeditious handling of the people's business by the law courts. He encouraged the use of videotape depositions for testimony and the videotaping of entire trials for court record purposes. Shortly before his death he exercised strong leadership at the national level to permit the public monitoring of regular court trials by television. He saw this as a crucial tool for educating the public in matters of justice—the business of the public.

Third, his greatest contribution to law teaching might well have been in the area of formal legal education. Because of O'Neill's leadership, the Ohio Supreme Court adopted rules to permit the certification of third-year law students as legal interns for clinical legal education. Under the supervision of Ohio lawyers in areas of public or charitable representation, law students may now put their book learning to practice in real cases. Legal education can utilize such internship experiences successfully. All it needed was a Chief Justice and a supreme court willing to elevate law practice in Ohio by elevating legal education.

Fourth, O'Neill ensured that law teaching does not end with graduation and admission to the Ohio bar. Integrity, too, must be taught or, rather, disciplined. Creation of the Office of Disciplinary Counsel in the Ohio Supreme Court and the mandatory registration of all lawyers practicing in Ohio are both important teaching devices. The Office will severely teach a few lawyers—and constantly remind all lawyers—that unethical and illegal law practices will not be condoned.

How can one sum up the unique teaching career of this pleasant, unassuming lawyer, the late Chief Justice? Not by his honorary degrees from several colleges. Not by his memberships in professional, civic, and veterans organizations. Not by his recognized scholarship as a member of Phi Beta Kappa. Not by his selection in 1950 by the United States Junior Chamber of Commerce as one of the ten most outstanding young men in America. C. William O'Neill can best be recognized for his commitment to do the right thing and to lead others to do the right thing. He had a mission to improve Ohio justice. He believed that the people deserved the best in law. He constantly emphasized that it was the people's justice and the people's law, and not just the law of judges and lawyers. Openness and progress were his goals. He did not always succeed. But he always tried. As a result, C. Wil-

liam O'Neill looms as a dominant and progressive figure in the history of Ohio law and justice.