

Judicial Profile

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Hon. John M. Manos U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Ohio

HAVING SERVED AS a judge in Cleveland for more than 40 years, U.S. District Judge John M. Manos is a legendary figure in the Northern District of Ohio and is revered both inside and outside the legal community. It is widely known that

anyone appearing before Judge Manos had better be prepared and punctual. And if you have ever had the good fortune to appear before Judge John M. Manos, you'll never forget your experience.

Walking down the corridor leading to the chambers of Judge John M. Manos, you pass the dozens of awards, plaques, and pictures that adorn the walls. Once in Judge Manos's chambers, your eyes are inevitably drawn to the many pictures of family members and friends, a poster of Gen. George Patton, and references to ancient and modern-day Greece. All these images help to bring into focus the complex persona that is John M. Manos. The son of Greek immigrants, Judge

Manos was instilled with a love of knowledge and, in particular, love of the ancient Greeks — ranging from Plato and Socrates to Solon and Pericles.

John Manos was born in Cleveland, Ohio, to Michael and Maria Manolitsis (later shortened to Manos), who had immigrated to Cleveland from Greece in search of the American dream. Judge Manos was born on Dec. 8, 1922, in the historic blue-collar Tremont neighborhood of Cleveland, situated a stone's throw from downtown Cleveland and bordered by steel mills and numerous factories. This Tremont neighborhood not only was home to Greek-Americans and many other immigrant families but also would also gain cinema notoriety; the wedding scene from the film "The Deer Hunter" was filmed here, as were many scenes from "A Christmas Story." Judge Manos speaks fondly of his loving parents and the value they placed on education as well as their dreams of a better life for their children. At bedtime, Judge Manos's father would read stories to John and his younger brother Elias about the ancient Greeks and their accomplishments. It was in this loving environment that John Manos was nurtured and came to love not only the teachings of the ancient Greeks but also knowledge itself.

Because he knew it would be a great hardship for his parents to send him to college, Judge Manos prepared himself for admission to West Point and was accepted. On the day he graduated from Lincoln High School in June 1940, John Manos was practicing his commencement address in the kitchen of their Tremont home when his parents received a telegram advising him that he had received a full scholarship to Case Western Reserve University's School of Applied Science in Cleveland. Although his heart was set on West Point, and Manos pleaded with his father, he followed his father's wishes and enrolled in CWRU because, according to Manos, "When a Greek father talks, his son listens."

While studying for a degree in metallurgical engineering at CWRU, Manos was also captain of the school's football team. After obtaining his degree in 1944 and completing service in the U.S. Navy, Judge Manos worked as a metallurgical engineer at a local foundry and married Viola Chevako. Even though he had planned to attend Harvard University to obtain a master's degree in business administration, when he learned that Viola was pregnant with their first child,



Photo courtesy of Bill Pappas Photography Inc.

he decided, instead, to attend the Cleveland Marshall College of Law at night so that he could work days to support his young family. Judge Manos graduated from the Cleveland Marshall College of Law in 1950 and was so excited by the practice of law that he forsook his engineering career and undertook the practice of law full time — despite his promotion to assistant plant manager of the metal foundry plant where he was employed.

In 1954, the same year the city of Bay Village, Ohio, was thrust in the national headlines with the sensational murder of the wife of physician Sam Sheppard and the subsequent trial — which formed the basis for the long-running television show and later movie “The Fugitive” — Manos was appointed the city’s law director. In 1963, he was appointed to fill a vacancy on the Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas and was elected to the position in 1964; he never forgot the support he received from Cleveland’s Greek-American community in that election. In 1969, he became a judge on the Ohio Court of Appeals, Eighth Appellate District. On March 17, 1976, he was appointed to the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Ohio and assumed senior status in 1991.

Having practiced law for 55 years, Judge Manos still exhibits the same passion for the practice of law. “Each case is exciting to me. Each case offers problems that have to be resolved.” After more than 40 years on the bench, Judge Manos still speaks enthusiastically about how much he enjoys the courtroom. “We listened to people who testified. We examined their credibility and determined what weight to give to their testimony. It was extraordinarily exciting,” he said.

An Internet search of items related to Judge John Manos reveals many Web pages devoted to the John M. Manos Writing Competition, which is sponsored by the Cleveland Marshall College of Law. Manos is known for his command of the Federal Rules of Evidence, and he can extemporaneously rattle off all of the hearsay exceptions along with an explanation of each. Pity the poor attorney who raises an objection in Manos’s courtroom and is unable to state the basis for the objection specifically; the attorney is likely to be scolded as Manos cites chapter and verse of the Federal Rules of Evidence. Whereas others may take walks for the exercise, Manos listens to audiotapes on evidence and other areas of the law while he is taking his walks.

Judge Manos is known for running a disciplined courtroom where attorneys arrive on time and spectators are expected to be quiet and respectful of the proceedings. I was trying a case before him on behalf of the U.S., when opposing counsel made an objection without rising to make it. Judge Manos leaned into the microphone and with his deep sonorous voice intoned, “You will rise in my courtroom when making an objection!” The attorney, a named partner at a Cleveland law firm, rose and began to mouth the word objection when the judge cut him off a millisecond later — “Overruled!”

Dozens of stories about Judge Manos have circulated through the legal community of northeastern Ohio over the past 25 years. Many of these stories have come from the many lawyers who clerked for Judge Manos over the years. When Judge Manos celebrated his 80th birthday two years ago, his former clerks compiled a series of anecdotes, two of which are recounted below.

In *United States v. Lonardo et al.*, the acting boss of an organized crime family in Cleveland and six of his lieutenants were on trial for running a multimillion-dollar drug enterprise and the murder of seven persons. Judge Manos presided over the trial that made the front pages of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* for weeks, with one sordid detail unfolding after another. One of the defendants, Carmen Zagaria, testified for three weeks about murders, bribery, and drug trafficking. At one point in Zagaria’s testimony, after several foundational objections, the judge turned to the defendant and said, “Mr. Zagaria, you can only testify about your colloquy with co-conspirators.” Apparently, the word colloquy obviously confused Zagaria. He turned to Judge Manos and said, “Judge, I know over the years I did a lot of bad things, but colloquy is not one of them.”

Not only is Judge Manos a student of ancient Greek philosophers and statesmen, but he is also fluent in modern Greek, and he has put this skill to good use — much to the dismay of out-of-town counsel one day. Two Greek-American business owners and their counsel were appearing before him on criminal antitrust charges. Obviously unaware of Judge Manos’s lineage, the defendants and their counsel began speaking in Greek in front of the judge. One whispered to the other in Greek, “The judge is worthless,” and the two continued to speak in Greek, making additional disparaging remarks about Judge Manos. What happened next is a scene straight from a television situation comedy. A Greek Orthodox priest who happened to be downtown asked the judge’s secretary if he could stop in to see Judge Manos. The Greek priest was ushered in, whereupon he and Judge Manos began speaking in Greek in front of the two business owners and their counsel. The defendants entered a guilty plea shortly thereafter.

Judge Manos is well known for putting in long hours and keeping his docket current. Although the demands placed on a federal judge are great, Judge Manos has always found time to serve as a teacher to the dozens of law clerks he has had over the past 29 years on the federal bench. On Saturday mornings, Judge Manos would hold training sessions for his law clerks. (It was universally understood that you worked on Saturdays as a clerk for the judge because Judge Manos also worked on Saturdays.) The judge would assign a legal problem for the clerks to research and orally argue. Judge Manos would then critique their arguments and instruct them on the strengths and weaknesses of their arguments. His clerks have attested to the value of these sessions and to how much this training helped hone their legal skills.

A gifted public speaker, Judge Manos delivers a

speech without notes and commands the attention of everyone present with his deep booming voice and his riveting gaze through his horn-rimmed glasses. In many of his speeches, he is likely to work in a short explanation of the jury system and how it was instituted in ancient Greece or why it is still worth studying Socrates today.

Even though he has received many awards throughout his judicial career (including the Ellis Island Medal of Honor), the award Judge Manos places above all others is the Solon Award that he received from the Order of the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association (AHEPA), a Greek-American fraternal organization. Judge Manos has been very active in his support of AHEPA, and through his efforts the Cleveland chapter of AHEPA has awarded more than \$300,000 to graduating high school seniors based upon academic merit. In fact, George Stephanopoulos, a senior adviser to former President Bill Clinton

and host of ABC's "This Week" on Sunday mornings, was a 1978 recipient of one of these scholarships.

Never aspiring to the federal Court of Appeals because it would deprive him of the opportunity to try cases, Judge Manos did serve as a judge in the Ohio Court of Appeals for seven years. He has always enjoyed the challenges of the courtroom and is an ardent supporter and believer in the American jury system.

Judge Manos is grateful for his four children and 10 grandchildren, with whom he is very close. His wife Viola died in 1989. **TFL**

Alex Rokakis, who has known Judge Manos since 1979, is an assistant U.S. attorney in the Civil Division of the Cleveland office of the U.S. attorney, Northern District of Ohio, where his practice includes qui tam litigation, civil fraud, food stamp litigation, and other civil matters.