

Adlai (pronounced Ad-lay) Ewing Stevenson II (1900-1965)

As governor of Illinois, Stevenson worked to reform state government, fight corruption, and improve the quality of life for the citizens of Illinois. As United States Ambassador to the United Nations, Adlai E. Stevenson helped guide the United States' stormy path through the Cold War—particularly during the **Bay of Pigs** episode and the **Cuban Missile Crisis**. Appointed by President John F. Kennedy, he helped bring the world back from the brink of war. He will be remembered as a politician who held himself, and America, to high ideals.

Stevenson was born on February 5, 1900, in Los Angeles, California to a family with a long history of political and **civic** involvement. His father, Lewis, was the son of Adlai E. Stevenson I, who was vice president of the United States during President Grover Cleveland's second term. His mother, Helen, was a member of Jesse Fell's family—a man who helped found of the Town of Normal and helped Abraham Lincoln obtain the office of President of the United States. Stevenson's parents' marriage was not a happy one. Perhaps this is why Stevenson's mother Helen devoted most of her time to supervising him. In 1906, Helen—with help from her father—purchased a home on Washington Street in Bloomington, and this became the family home. Stevenson attended school nearby at Washington Elementary, then Thomas Metcalf School, and University High School at Illinois State Normal University (better known today as Illinois State University).

Stevenson had little interest in school, and he was often absent. As a result, his grades were not good. To better prepare for college, Stevenson left Bloomington to attend the Choate school (a private all-male school in Connecticut). His mother, concerned for his development, followed him out east and lived nearby, as she did when next he attended Princeton University. At Princeton he was a very active student, becoming managing editor of the school newspaper and taking part in many social and political events. Next he attended Harvard Law School. However, he still was not a serious student. Stevenson was forced to drop out in his second year. He returned to Bloomington and seemed destined for a career at the family owned newspaper, *The Pantagraph*. When that did not work out, Stevenson returned to law school, graduated in 1926 from Northwestern University Law School, and went on to join a **prestigious** Chicago law firm.

In December 1928, Stevenson married Ellen Borden, one of Chicago's most eligible **debutants** and a member of one of the wealthiest families in the city. Stevenson and his wife Ellen had three sons, but the couple's marriage was a difficult one (like Stevenson's parents') and ended in divorce in 1949.

During the 1930s and 1940s, Stevenson became increasingly involved in politics and foreign relations. He worked for President Franklin Roosevelt's **New Deal** programs. He became a member, and later president, of the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations. At the outbreak of World War II in Europe, Stevenson became involved with the Chicago branch of the Committee to Defend America by Aiding Allies, whose goal was economic aid to our European allies. In 1943, he was sent to Italy by the government to investigate the Italian economy after the fall of Benito Mussolini and the **fascists**. Stevenson then served as assistant to the Secretary of State.

In the years following the war, Stevenson helped form the **United Nations** (UN). He was a delegate to the organizing conference in San Francisco. In 1947, Stevenson returned to Chicago and was approached by the Democratic Party to be its candidate in the 1948 election for governor of Illinois. Stevenson was more interested in national and foreign affairs, but he reluctantly said yes. He kicked off his campaign in Bloomington, and promised to “clean up

Illinois.” He **soundly** defeated his opponent, **Dwight Green**, and became Illinois’s thirty-third governor.

As governor, Stevenson worked to improve life in Illinois. He restructured the State Police on a strict **merit** system. He increased state aid to schools, as well as to the needy and the disabled. He reformed the state **welfare** system, repaired and expanded Illinois highways, and fought for economic accountability by cutting **frivolous** spending and payroll **padding**.

Stevenson was ready and wanting to run for a second term as governor, but the national Democratic Party wanted him as their candidate for president. **Contrary** to his desire to stay governor, Stevenson agreed and ran for president in both 1952 and 1956. Unfortunately, his opponent was the hugely popular WWII hero General Dwight Eisenhower, and Stevenson was defeated both times in a landslide victory for the Republicans. Stevenson hoped to run again, but in 1960, he stepped aside for the up-and-coming senator from Massachusetts, John F. Kennedy. Stevenson worked hard for the Kennedy campaign by traveling the country and speaking to crowds. He wanted to be made Secretary of State in Kennedy’s administration, but was named Ambassador to the United Nations instead. Though disappointed with this position, he agreed. The decision turned out to be a great one.

This period was the height of the **Cold War** between the U.S.S.R (Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics) and the United States. It was also a struggle between **communism** and **democracy**. Russia (U.S.S.R.) wanted a military base in the western hemisphere. In Cuba, just 90 miles south of Florida, communist **dictator** Fidel Castro had gained power. In 1961, the United States supported a failed attempt to defeat Castro known as the Bay of Pigs incident. Just a year later, Russia sought to install **ballistic** missiles on the island aimed at the United States. They claimed to be aiding Cuba in its defense against further attacks from the U.S. This situation led to what is referred to as the Cuban Missile Crisis. As Russian ships cruised toward Cuba carrying nuclear **warheads**, the United States sent ships to form a **blockade** around the island. In his position as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Stevenson presented evidence of the threat as the unfolding drama was broadcast to millions everywhere on television. Fortunately, an agreement was reached that specified that Russia would remove its missiles and warheads from Cuba, and that the U.S. would later remove missiles it had in Turkey and promise not to invade Cuba again. The agreement has held to this day. Americans watched on television as the Russian ships turned to return home.

Stevenson remained U.S. ambassador to the United Nations for several more years. His cool head, his **poise** in tense situations, and his ability to compromise helped keep the peace in those troubled times.

In 1965, while walking down a London street with a friend, Adlai E. Stevenson II collapsed and died of a heart attack. After a service in the National Cathedral in Washington D.C., his body was returned to Illinois to **lie in state** in the capitol in Springfield. Over 42,000 people paid their respects to him there. Finally, he came home to Bloomington. In attendance at the funeral at the Unitarian Church on Emerson Street were U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson, the vice president, and the chief justice of the Supreme Court. Stevenson is buried at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.

Discussion Question: How did Adlai Stevenson clean up Illinois government? Be specific.