

The Celebrezze Dynasty

*Building the biggest name
in Ohio politics*

By Charles Stella

Dynasty? What dynasty?" asked Judge Anthony J. Celebrezze of the U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals. The political dynasty is that of the Celebrezze family. Ohio has a new attorney general, the chief justice of the Ohio Supreme Court, another justice of the Supreme Court and one of the most illustrious former mayors of Cleveland — all with the name Celebrezze.

That has all the trappings of a dynasty.

You have to be a graybeard to recall that the first well-known Celebrezze in Cleveland politics was not Anthony J., but his older brother, the late Frank D., who was appointed as a Municipal Court judge in 1937 and served for less than a year; was safety director under Mayor Frank J. Lausche and Mayor Thomas A. Burke from 1942-46, and was reappointed to the Municipal Court, serving from 1946 to 1953.

Therein lies a tale. Somehow relations soured between Anthony's and Frank's families. No one seems to know why but the most frequently cited explanation is that the Frank Celebrezze family resented being overshadowed when Anthony became mayor.

The Celebrezzes may not talk to one another, but they talk to the voters just about every two years with an amazing record of success.

It even helps to have a name that sounds like Celebrezze. Orlando A. Calabrese was an obscure bartender and bouncer in a downtown gin mill when he changed his name to Anthony O. Calabrese to run in 1952 for the Ohio Legislature.

The gambit worked. Certainly it was a major factor in getting Calabrese ("Whaddaya want, good grammar or good government?") elected time after time. At least until he was sent into political retirement by the mild-mannered Ben M. Skall, clothier, in 1980.

By far the most famous Celebrezze — so far at least — is Anthony J.

Anthony, 72, was one of 13 children reared on the law wagon of a Wheeling & Lake Erie Railroad



Illustration by Chuck Carter

Clockwise from center top: James P., Anthony J. Jr., Anthony J., the late Frank D. (Municipal Court judge) and his son Frank D. (chief justice of the Ohio Supreme Court).

cement cart and carried a hod as a railroad worker earning school money in the Depression years.

At Central High School he was more interested in football than in grades. The girl who was valedictorian of the class, Anne Marco, later became his wife.

One of the leading influences in young Anthony's life was a gray-haired teacher, Jessie Duff. She was a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, with a penchant for selling wholesome American citizenship to young street urchins.

Anthony Celebrezze and some of his 10 brothers joined her Teddy Roosevelt Club, which produced an amazing number of successful professionals, businessmen and a leading politician in Cleveland.

While at John Carroll University, Celebrezze

made his first political contacts, with Thomas A. Burke, and Ray T. Miller, a man he lambasted as a political boss when Celebrezze was first elected mayor.

He struggled through Ohio Northern University where he won his law degree in 1936. He married Anne, practiced law and dabbled in politics before being elected to the Ohio Senate in 1950.

Celebrezze was elected to the first of an unprecedented five terms as mayor of Cleveland in 1951.

There are those who say he was the political creation of Louis B. Seltzer and the Cleveland Press. The truth is a bit different, though. Celebrezze was not endorsed by the Press the first time he ran for the Ohio Senate. When he ran for re-

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election on the old bedsheet ballot, he led the ticket in Cuyahoga County.

While acknowledging his close friendship to Seltzer, Celebrezze says: "Louie didn't ask me to run for mayor, but he backed me after I decided to make the race.

"You've heard all those stories about the tunnel running from City Hall to the Press. Let me tell you, though, how I got treated once when I asked Louie what he thought of some plans I had as mayor.

"Go ahead, Mayor, it sounds wonderful to me," Louie said.

"Then two days later the Press tore my hide off for the same thing he had told me sounded wonderful.

"Louie told me often, 'You're the one who was elected mayor, and you're the one who makes the decisions in this town, not the Press.'"

In his two outer offices and in his own spacious inner office in the Old Federal Courthouse downtown are literally dozens of plaques honoring the semi-re-

tired judge. And there are a host of pictures of Celebrezze with the great figures of the last two decades. Celebrezze often points out a large color portrait of John Kennedy and Jacqueline, with an inscription to Celebrezze.

"That snapshot of the

"After I had the job for four years, I told Lyndon Johnson that I didn't want to be in Washington any longer. I couldn't afford it. 'Make me a federal judge,' I said to him."

Kennedys in the corner of that portrait was taken an hour before Kennedy was assassinated," the judge said.

One gets the impression that all these testimonials to Celebrezze's achievements are necessary to remind the world how far he has come.

His face is creased in sorrow when he describes how his father was abused because he was a foreigner.

"Why do you take all that abuse?" I would ask my father. "If I quit my job, who would take care of the family?" he would answer.

"When my older brother, Frank, was a judge and a law director, he [our father] was still suffering insults because he was an Italian. 'I take all this,' he would say to me, 'so my children won't have to go through this.'"

Anthony speaks of his late brother with respect: "He was 15 years older than I was. He was more like a father to me than a brother.

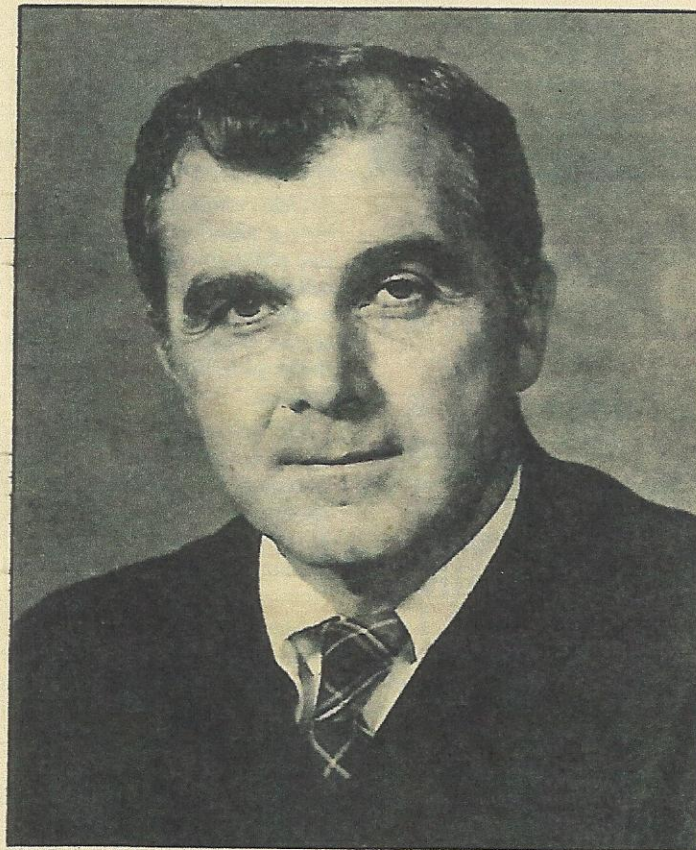
"If my brother Frank had been a criminal, maybe I would have been a criminal, but he went to Notre Dame and became



Above, the late Frank D. Celebrezze when he was a Municipal Court judge, 1937. Right, Anthony J. Celebrezze.



Photo by Bruce Zake



Frank D. Celebrezze, chief justice of the Ohio Supreme Court.

a lawyer, so I became a lawyer."

And here the judge's face tightens as he says, "Still, today, there are people who think that all Italians belong to the Mafia. Even judges on this bench believe that."

As mayor, Celebrezze's monument was the downtown urban renewal project called Erievue, the centerpieces of which were the Convention Center and Erievue Tower.

"At City Hall 30 years ago we could see that the big industrial cities were going to be in trouble. That's why we started Erievue, to make Cleveland into the kind of city that corporations would want to have their headquarters in. We wanted to be able to tell corporation executives that we had a downtown airport. Why Burke Airport never became a big success is something I can't figure out."

During his fifth term as mayor, Celebrezze was called to Washington by the Kennedy administration to head HEW (Health Education and Welfare).

Celebrezze, who had supported John Kennedy for vice presi-

dent in 1956, became the first Italian American to serve in the cabinet. Under his tenure (1962-65), HEW was responsible for initiating a great amount of social legislation.

"After I had the job for four years," said Celebrezze, "I told Lyndon Johnson that I didn't want to be in Washington any longer. I couldn't afford it. 'Make me a federal judge,' I said to him.

"Is that the only reason?" he asked me.

"No, I want to be a federal judge so I can decide if all the legislation I was responsible for is constitutional."

Celebrezze is aware that some people think federal judges are tyrants or egomaniacs.

A framed cartoon in his office shows a clergyman saying "I never met God, but I do know a federal judge."

It is not the kind of self-effacing evidence one would find in the offices of some federal judges, like perhaps District Court Judge Frank J. Battisti.

Does Celebrezze believe some school busing decisions in federal courts have been too sweeping?

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"Yes, I do. I wrote a dissent in the Memphis school busing case. I think you can carry things too far. Who are you going to integrate if all the whites flee to the suburbs?"

Two men who followed Celebrezze's career closely give him varying marks as Cleveland's most celebrated mayor since Tom L. Johnson.

Tom Boardman, editor of the Press for 14 years and a good friend of Celebrezze, sees him as an able mayor of the city at a time of relative quiet when a mayor was called on largely to see that all the housekeeping duties were carried out faithfully.

"The idea for Erievue was kicking around before Tony became mayor," says Boardman. "You could walk down 9th St. and get propositioned four times before you got to the cathedral. The legend now is that the Press put the heat on Celebrezze for Erievue because we found ourselves in an area of disrepute, but that's not really how it was.

"I remember that Tony used to fight like hell with Jack Russell (Council president 1955-63). But mostly that was for show, like George Forbes' tirades against Voinovich. When something important had to be done, Tony and Russell would cooperate to see that it got done."

Julian Krawcheck, retired Press columnist, says of Celebrezze's reign: "If you're going to give him credit for Erievue, then he has to take the blame for making a wasteland out of University Circle.

"East 105th and Euclid, Doan's Corners, was a splendid business area, a second downtown. But when City Hall announced it had plans for University Circle, the merchants didn't keep up their property, figuring the city was going to knock it down anyway. But the city didn't do anything for years and the area just became an eyesore. Don't forget there were six fine hotels at one time in University Circle. No other city in the country could boast of an area like that."

Krawcheck sees Erievue as a mixed blessing.

"The construction of the

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buildings was never policed the way it should have been. And Louie Seltzer decreed that no negative stories would be written about Erieview. So you got things like the concrete jungle in front of the Erieview Tower. Who wants to eat his lunch on a concrete bench?

"Tony Celebrezze was probably the most energetic and influential mayor we've had — but that's still not saying much. Sadly he didn't have the vision to see that Cleveland's neighborhoods needed a gigantic rescue effort."

In some ways, the most controversial of the Celebrezzes is the chief justice of the Ohio Supreme Court, Frank. He is intense, strait-laced and uncomfortable with reporters.

While on the Common Pleas bench here he flirted with the idea of running for mayor in 1969 against the incumbent, Carl B. Stokes. Frank let it be known that he would make the race if all segments of the community rallied behind him and there was an obvious showing of dissatisfaction with Stokes. The reaction to Frank's "draft-me" approach was almost nonexistent, so he stayed in his jurist's robes.

Earlier last year he mounted what was to be the shortest campaign for governor in recent history. Many in the legal community thought it was unethical for him to let his supporters carry forth his unannounced campaign while he stayed on the high court, but that didn't deter him. Frank finally announced formally, only to issue an embarrassed statement a few days later that he was pulling out of the race because of a lack of financial backing.

He is about as conservative as a northern Democrat can get. Like President Reagan, he yearns for an America that may be gone, or perhaps never was — an America of high-minded moralists, hardworking and independent, without the obnoxious presence of long-haired dissidents.

In a revealing speech made several years ago before the Akron Bar Association, he

warned of a revolt against marriage, attacked what he called the counterculture and ridiculed environmental activists.

"My whole philosophy, if I have a philosophy, is a progressive philosophy. It is neither conservative nor what I would think of as liberal."

"The counterculture has three Ps — promiscuity, prostitution and perversion."

Not uncharacteristically, he leveled an attack against the media not long after. He told the Ohio Association of Broadcasters: "You are developing a

credibility problem and it is getting worse."

Still, he does not see himself as a conservative or a reactionary. In fact he called his speech in Akron progressive.

"My whole philosophy, if I have a philosophy, is a progressive philosophy," he said. "It is neither conservative nor what I would think of as liberal. Some of the things that are done in the name of liberalism are hardly forward."

He graduated from Baldwin Wallace College and Cleveland Marshall Law School. He was successful in his first try at office in 1956, elected to the Ohio Senate as the unendorsed Democratic candidate.

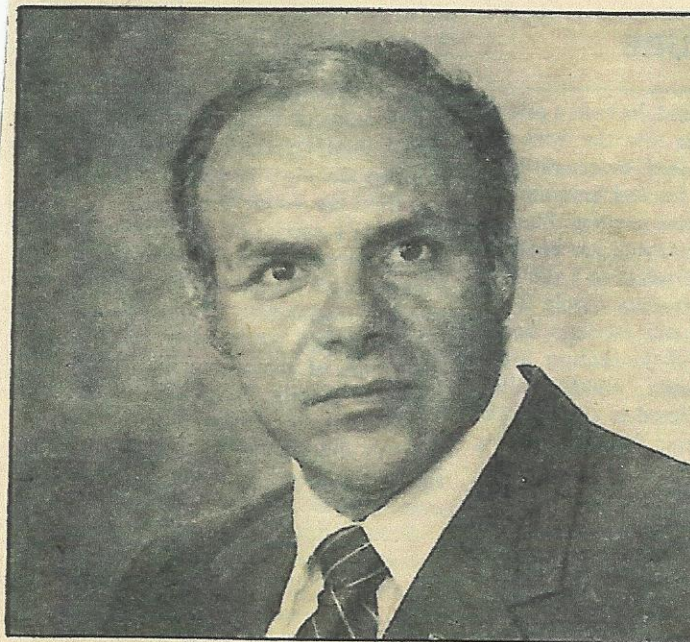
He ran unsuccessfully for county commissioner and later was elected to the Common Pleas Court in 1964. On the bench here he was a tough judge, feared for his harsh sentences.

It used to annoy him to be referred to as the nephew of the former mayor. He is fiercely proud of his father, Frank D., whom he credits with making the family name politically potent as a Municipal Court judge and law director.

The Ohio Supreme Court has taken some forward steps under Frank's leadership. Cameras and



Anthony J. Celebrezze Jr., Ohio attorney general.



James P. Celebrezze, Ohio Supreme Court justice.

tape recorders were permitted in court, with some restrictions, carrying forward the policy of his predecessor, the late C. William O'Neill. Frank wrote new rules for the introduction of evidence in trials and reformed the ethics guidelines for lawyers.

Among lawyers who have argued cases before the Ohio Supreme Court, there is no unanimity about Frank's competence.

If Frank appears now to be politically frozen in the Supreme Court, his cousin, Ohio Attorney General Anthony Celebrezze Jr., does not. He's been in politics for nine years and is a dedicated public official. Many think he may outstrip his famous father but he does not see himself staying in the game forever.

"I think a politician should reach a point where he says, 'I have accomplished all I can, and now I'm getting out.'"

Does this mean he wouldn't run for governor in three years if, for some reason, Dick Celeste chose not to run?

"I can't make that kind of prediction. This is a day-to-day business. Five years ago I never thought I would run against Ted W. Brown [secretary of state at that time]. But I took another look at the race and figured he was beatable."

And Tony did beat Brown by a slim 8,000 votes. Brown got a free recount that took six weeks.

with your stomach all tied up in a knot?" Celebrezze asked.

Neither Tony Jr. nor his father thought the younger Celebrezze would go into politics.

"It was the last thing I thought I would ever do. When you grow up in a political family, you live your life in a fishbowl. My father went into politics because that's the only avenue that was open to him at the time. But he wanted something else for me. When I was in the service though [in the Navy after graduating from Annapolis] I saw things in this country that I didn't like. I thought politics was the best way I could help change those things.

"People think if your name is Celebrezze, all you have to do is put your name on a ticket. That's a great tribute to my father and my Uncle Frank. But being a Celebrezze is a great burden, it means you're held to higher standards than other public officials."

Tony Jr. lived up to this high standard as a state senator. He was known as a legislator's legislator, someone other lawmakers would come to for advice and counsel on drafting and shaping legislation.

His monument in the Legislature should have been new collective bargaining legislation for public employees to replace the unworkable Ferguson Act. Celebrezze worked tirelessly on

see it vetoed by Gov. James A. Rhodes.

As secretary of state, Tony Jr. modernized the office and often held voter registration campaigns to sign up young people, the elderly and members of minorities.

What about James P. Celebrezze, the younger brother of Frank?

A county officeholder who knows Jim well, and likes him, says of him: "If his name weren't Celebrezze, he probably would be just another lawyer."

A graduate of Ohio State and Cleveland Marshall Law School, he entered public life by being elected to the Legislature in 1965. He followed his brother Frank to the bench, first in Domestic Relations Court and then the Appellate Court in 1980.

Earlier last year, with relatively little judicial experience, he became a candidate for the Ohio Supreme Court. Both the Ohio State Bar Association and the Greater Cleveland Bar Association found him unqualified for the state's highest court. In the local bar poll he garnered a lowly 32% favorable response, while 70% is generally needed for a "qualified" rating.

No matter. The name Celebrezze was magic again and early in November he was elevated to the Ohio Supreme Court.

Jim probably got more attention for a race he didn't win, than for those he did. In 1976 he entered the Democratic primary for Congress against his cousin, Tony Jr.

Why would he torpedo his cousin? The reason stated publicly was that Tony Jr. had broken a promise to back Anthony Calabrese for president pro tem of the Ohio Senate. The real reason probably was the old Celebrezze family dispute.

With Jim siphoning off 5% of the vote in the crowded primary, Tony ran second — by 5 percentage points — behind Mary Rose Oakar.

There was a lesson in that election: About the only time you can be sure a Celebrezze will lose an election in Ohio is when he runs against another