

Excerpts from letters written by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes to Professor Harold J. Laski, Devon Lodge, Addison Bridge Place, London, W. 14, England, who is in possession of the originals.

April 2nd, 1925.

I do not know if you know our new Justice, Harlan Stone. Felix tells me that he has a strong and vigorous mind. I know from a brief talk that his interests are not narrow.

June 12th, 1925.

You ask about Stone. I like all I have seen of him – clear, forthright, vigorous. He speaks out and speaks well. He is aware of his own promises. And he is not afraid to look his task in the face. Altogether an acquisition.

Sept. 29th, 1925.

Stone grows on one. Many of my insights are not his. But he is brave and honorable. He thinks straight. He fights for his principles, and I think he knows, in the way I hope to have known, the necessary limitations we must place on ourselves as a court.

Jan. 2nd, 1926.

Brandeis and Stone both give me great comfort. Old age breeds loneliness if only because there are so few with whom one can exchange memories. But they give me friendship that is more than formal. They labour to give the Court a real breadth of statesmanship. Stone learns all the time. He has a rugged strength that is impressive.

March 19th, 1926.

Some good talks with Stone in recess. You must meet him when you come – not since Brandeis have I had quite the same pleasure in the brethren as he gives me.

April 4th, 1927.

I send you a decision of Stone's along with my own – as always, clear, direct and incisive. You can see that he says what he wants to say so that the jugular is cut. It is a relief to support a judge who puts his knife in where the blood is drawn.

Sept. 15th, 1927.

I confess that, after three months, I look forward to being in harness again; the company of Brandeis and Stone gives me exhilaration. They do not shrink from ideas.

Jan. 19th, 1928.

...I was interested in what you say of Stone. Probably he has not my interest in history. But he looks backward in order to look forward. He seizes central principles firmly and builds solidly around them. Your word "Masculine" is the right word; and he goes on learning.

Nov. 4th, 1928.

I always know that I can count on Stone to see what I am after. He gives me a kindness that makes me feel I have his affection as well as his intelligence. He is a stout-hearted fellow.

May 12th, 1929.

Brandeis is, of course, incomparable in his grasp of fact. But even he is not more incisive than Stone. Any discussion with him makes you feel that Stone is going to get down to bedrock; and when he is there he fights. I like a good soldier.

Oct. 29th, 1929.

Stone saw me home, kind as always. My talk with him is always revealing – he is interested in principles. The trouble with many of the brethren is that they can't see the wood for the trees.

Jan. 15th, 1930.

Stone would, I think, make a great Chief Justice. I should have liked it ten years ago; now I am too old. But he is a man of dispatch, he knows the world, and he can take a detached view. And he is as straight as a die. His courtesy to me may affect my judgment – one clings to one's friends. But he has helped to make the Court a happy place to me in a special way.

May 5th, 1930.

Look at Stone's work this term – clear, vigorous, hard-hitting. He has grown consistently in the years since he came to Washington. That is not always true of the brethren.

Nov. 6th, 1930.

A good talk with Stone. He feels as I do about Pound. I always remember with pleasure that you and Felix had to give way on this. Stone, I think, found him out long before you two youngsters did.

March 12th, 1931.

I liked all you said about Stone. I owe him much for friendship given with grace and energy. At my age now friends are not easy to acquire – the gulf between the sixties and the nineties is a big one. But he bridges it without effort and makes me feel that I am significant for him. It is not merely vanity that gives me pleasure in this.

June 6th, 1931.

I would like to try out what you say on Stone. His experience as Attorney General has given him insights into government more profound than mine. That comes out in all out talk. I have learned a good deal from him by hearing how the big machine, from which I have been aloof, really works.

Dec. 4th, 1931.

Good talk with Stone. We have much in common; and when he praises Felix there is a glow in his voice which goes to my heart.

Jan. 4th, 1932.

Stone thinks I underestimate Ames. But we both agree in putting Thayer above him; and he spoke of Thayer's piece on Marshall as you would have wished to hear him speak. I like him for many qualities, not least because his heart is warm and is not allowed to grow cold. He feels what he writes, but he thinks as he feels. He would have made the best Chief of my time. I must not comment on what you say of Hughes; but you will infer that I do not blame you for being empathetic. We both belong to the Stone age.

April 20th, 1933.

I would like him to be Cardozo; and he would, I am confident, get from Brandeis and Stone the kind of empathy I have had from them – a thing more precious than any outsider to the Court can realize.

September 6th, 1932.

Stone grows all the time. There is something massive about him, and a power of energy in his thinking. He and Brandeis give me comfort such as I have rarely known.