

Update on DOJ's Much-Coveted AG Jackson Portrait

*John Q. Barrett**

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During his seven-plus years as a high official in the Executive Branch of the United States Government, Robert H. Jackson served mostly in the U.S. Department of Justice. Yes, Jackson started at Treasury—he came to Washington when President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed him in 1934 to serve as Assistant General Counsel in the Treasury Department's Bureau of Internal Review. Yes, Jackson was detailed in late 1935 from Treasury to the Securities and Exchange Commission. But from 1936 through Spring 1941, Jackson was a leader, and he rose to be the leader, at DOJ.

President Roosevelt nominated Jackson three times, each confirmed by the Senate, to serve in the Justice Department. In 1936, Jackson was appointed Assistant Attorney General. He spent that year heading the Tax Division and the next year heading the Antitrust Division. In March 1938, Jackson was appointed Solicitor General, then the Department's number two position. And in January 1940, Jackson was appointed Attorney General. He served in that Cabinet office until he was appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court in July 1941.

The Department then arranged for Jackson's official AG portrait to be painted. John Christen Johansen, one of America's most noted portrait painters, produced it in Fall 1942 following sittings with Jackson.

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For an archive of selected Jackson List posts, many of which include document images or photographs, visit <http://thejacksonlist.com>. This essay is posted there as a PDF file with "live" hyperlinks.

To subscribe to The Jackson List, which does not display recipient identities or distribute their email addresses, send "subscribe" to barrettj@stjohns.edu.

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The Department of Justice has a collection of portraits of each Attorney General—[click here](#) to see its online portrait gallery. By custom, a perk of serving as a senior DOJ official is the right to choose, in office rank order, which former AG portrait(s) one wishes to hang in his and her offices and conference rooms.

As I have chronicled previously (see links below), the Jackson portrait has been, over the years, in high demand. I cannot (yet) document all of its homes since 1941, but I know that:

- Solicitor General Seth P. Waxman (1997-2001) had the Jackson portrait in his conference room;
- Solicitor General Paul D. Clement (2005-2008) had the Jackson portrait in his immediate office;

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- Attorney General Michael B. Mukasey (2007-2009) had the Jackson portrait in his office;
- Attorney General Eric H. Holder, Jr. (2009-2015) had the Jackson portrait in his conference room;
- Solicitor General Donald B. Verrilli, Jr. (2011-2016) could not get the Jackson portrait away from AG Holder, so Verrilli had a copy made and kept that in his office; and
- Deputy Attorney General Rod J. Rosenstein (2017-2019) had the Jackson portrait in his conference room.

Rosenstein of course resigned as DAG this Spring.

We now know, thanks to the WALL STREET JOURNAL's July 13, 2019, report, that Attorney General William P. Barr was waiting to snag the Jackson portrait. It today hangs, again, in the AG's—Jackson's former—office.

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Some links—

- Sadie Gurman, “Justice Department Chiefs Can’t Get Enough of the Patron Saint of the Rule of Law,” WALL STREET JOURNAL ONLINE, July 13, 2019 ([click here](#)—paywall-blocked from non-subscribers, but they can access it through libraries, etc....);

(And thanks, WSJ, for the article’s generous mention of the Jackson List and you many subscribers. This motivated many more of you to become new subscribers.)

- a 2007 Jackson List post, “Office Wall Décor” ([click here](#));
- a 2008 Jackson List post, “An Update on Attorney General Mukasey's Office Décor” ([click here](#));

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- a 2009 Jackson List post, “Department of Justice Installations, New and Permanent” ([click here](#)); and
- my 2003 BUFFALO LAW REVIEW article, “A Jackson Portrait for Jamestown, ‘A Magnet in the Room,’” which discusses Jackson’s participation in tribute and dedication events and his various portraits that are displayed in locations throughout the U.S. ([click here](#)).