

On the U.S. Supreme Court is a Justice descended from West African slaves and born to a young mother, not more than 20, in segregated Georgia. Home was Pin Point, among the Gullah-Geechee and oysters and marshlands. His father left. And a fire took all he had and the shack where he lived.

He was sent to Savannah along with his brother. They lived in their mother's one-room tenement. Then, still just a child, taking all his belongings in a half-filled paper grocery bag, he went to live with his grandparents, Myers and Christine Anderson. It was the longest and most significant journey of his life. He and his brother flushed the indoor toilet every time they walked by. The kitchen refrigerator dazzled them.

His grandfather enrolled him in a Catholic school run by Irish nuns. It was a segregated school of only black children. The Klan marched through Savannah. And Forsyth Park was for whites only. During the summers, he sawed trees by hand and plowed behind a horse named Lizzie at his grandfather's farm—a farm owned since freedom came at long last to his family.

He chose the seminary to finish school, set on becoming a priest. He was at times the only black seminarian among a sea of white faces. Then came 1968. King was assassinated. Then Kennedy. It transformed him. He left behind hopes of the priesthood. He found Black Power. He wrote about revolution. He protested.

He went to law school. He became a father. He worked for legal aid. He saw forced busing and violence and insolence in South Boston. He devoted himself to doing better for his son.

He took the road less traveled. He went to work for Republican Jack Danforth in the middle of Missouri. It was his only job offer. Years later, he went to Washington, D.C. He joined the Reagan