YESSAYAN APPOINTED MASS. SUPERIOR COURT JUDGE

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Category: Opinions

By **David Boyajian**, Massachusetts USA, 1 February 2015

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A graduate of the New England School of Law, the University of Massachusetts at Boston, and Boston Latin School, Yessayan, 46, moved to the United States from Lebanon with his family in 1970.

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From 1995 to 2007, Yessayan was an Assistant District Attorney (ADA) for Suffolk County, which includes Boston.

During his tenure, the Brian J. Honan Charitable Fund gave him its award for "excellence in the courtroom and commitment to the communities we serve."

Yessayan was a board member of the George Lewis Ruffin Society. Named after the first African American (1834 - 1886) to graduate from Harvard Law School, it serves minority communities. Yessayan was also board president of the Dorchester Community Center for the Visual Arts, which offers art classes for children. For Read Boston, a literacy program for children, he read to students and helped to select books for its annual awards. Says Yessayan of his community work, "I am trying to make a difference."

He co-produced *Understanding Violence*, a gang prevention film and curriculum intended for young people, teachers, and mental health professionals.

In his first years as an ADA, Yessayan prosecuted violent felonies, drug trafficking, illegal firearm possession, and juvenile offenses. As a Rapid Indictment Prosecutor, he brought shooting cases before grand juries within 48 hours.

In 2002, he became Chief ADA for the "Gang Unit". Working with Federal and state agencies and the Boston Police, he supervised gang related prosecutions.

After leaving the DA's office in 2007, Yessayan began a private practice focusing on criminal defense and immigration law. His clients ranged from children, the poor, the mentally ill, and the drug-addicted to businesspersons and police officers.

In 2010, the Quincy (Massachusetts) Bar Association gave him its Public Service Award. The Massachusetts House of Representatives appointed him to its Gun Advisory Group in 2013 because of his expertise in prosecuting gun offenses.

As a justice, Yessayan was required to give up his private practice.

He has authored two crime novels published by Ballantine Books/Random House: *2 in the Hat* and *8 in the Box.* Each focuses on the hunt for a serial killer in Boston.

On arriving in America in 1970, the Yessayan family settled in West Roxbury, a mainly blue-collar and middle class White and Irish Catholic neighborhood of Boston. The father, Nerses, owned a local Mediterranean imports business.

When Raffi was 7, his mother Azniv passed away, leaving her husband, three daughters, and four sons. The oldest children, Hasmig and Hagop, helped to raise their siblings. Their father died in 2008.

Raffi Yessayan's paternal grandfather, Yessayi Yessayan, hailed from the city of Aintab. Though he survived the 1915 Genocide because the Turks needed his carpentry skills, he later died in his mid-20s in Aleppo, Syria. His wife's name was Serpouhi.

Raffi Yessayan's maternal grandmother, Rebecca Tashjian Garabedian, was from Severeg in the Dikranagerd/Diyarbekir province of Western Armenia. She was the only member of her family to survive the Genocide. Rebecca's husband, Krikor, survived the Genocide that killed his family. They met in an orphanage in Jibeyl, Lebanon.

Many Armenian Americans are familiar with the Superior Court because of the unsuccessful candidacy of attorney Joseph Berman. Nominated by Governor Patrick in 2013, Berman failed to win approval by the Governor's Council after a long, heated battle that aroused Boston media and the legal establishment.

Among the reasons for Berman's loss were his large, questionable contributions to political candidates, and a lack of candor about having asked then-State Senator, now Congresswoman, Katherine Clark, to call Governor's Councilors on his behalf.

Another factor was Berman's position as a National Commissioner of the Anti-Defamation League, known for diminishing the factuality of the Armenian Genocide and working with Turkey against a Congressional resolution on that genocide. Though Berman claimed to have opposed the ADL's

anti-Armenian policies when they made national and international headlines in 2007, there was little proof of that.

Associate Superior Court Justice Carol S. Ball testified for Yessayan at his Governor's Council hearing. She called him "extremely intelligent and talented" and "blessed with common sense and great compassion."

He is one of about eighty Superior Court justices in Massachusetts. Justice Yessayan's wife, Candice, teaches college-level English.

Yessayan has addressed Armenian organizations, including the Men's Club of St. James Armenian Apostolic Church in Watertown, Mass.

He is apparently the first Armenian American to sit on the Massachusetts Superior Court.

David Boyajian is a freelance Armenian American journalist. Many of his articles are archived at Armeniapedia.org.