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## In Memoriam: F. Hodge O'Neal

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## **In Memoriam**

F. HODGE O'NEAL

One who aspires to, or admires success in, academia is awed by the life of F. Hodge O'Neal. From a humble (at least by the usual standards) beginning in rural north Louisiana, Hodge became one of the preeminent legal scholars of our time. A prodigious writer and a penetrating legal analyst, he achieved the unique distinction of creating a new subject in the study (and the subsequent application) of law—close corporations and the oppression of minority shareholders. Yet he possessed the leadership ability to merit selection as dean of three prestigious law schools. Beyond those professional accomplishments, he emerged to those who knew him best as a warm, gentle, caring friend who enjoyed the good laugh and the good life.

Hodge began his good life in Rayville, in the northeast corner of Louisiana, where his father was a pharmacist and a farmer. Hodge gave some hint of the man to come when as a high school student he played end on the football team but made Latin and English his favorite subjects. After two years at Northeastern in Monroe (it was then LSU's Northeast Center), he transferred to the Baton Rouge campus, was a straight A student in his junior year, and then entered the law school. Three years later, in 1940, he graduated with an almost perfect average, the ranking of first in his class, the editorship of the Louisiana Law Review, and a fellowship for graduate study at Yale.

After a year of graduate study and a brief stint with a New York City law firm, Hodge served four years as an officer in the Navy in World War II. He began his teaching career at the University of Mississippi but soon moved on to Mercer, first as acting dean and later as dean (1948-56). During this same period, he earned doctor of laws degrees from both Yale (1949) and Harvard (1954), often joking that the two degrees "cancelled each other out." In 1956 Hodge became professor of law at Vanderbilt, and in 1959 he joined the Duke Faculty. In 1968 he became Dean of the Duke Law School, and served eight years in that capacity.

Hodge left the deanship at Duke to become a distinguished professor at Washington University, and subsequently served as dean

there for five years (1980-85). After retiring from his third deanship, Hodge returned to teaching at Washington University. He became Professor Emeritus in 1988, but was active until his death, teaching a regular complement of courses at Washington University and serving as a visiting professor at other law schools.

Hodge's legal scholarship included numerous treatises and texts and innumerable law review articles. His greatest achievement, however, was his recognition of the inadequacy of the law's treatment of minority shareholders in family or "close" corporations. His work in this area ultimately led to judicial and legislative recognition that close corporations and their shareholders require treatment different from that which the law provides to the traditional public corporation/shareholder. Complementing this was his pioneering in "preventive law," the systematic process of counseling clients about legal requirements and the consequent avoidance of disputes and litigation.

Hodge maintained his close ties with Louisiana, serving as visiting professor at the LSU Law School and returning to visit relatives in north Louisiana. The visits to the LSU Law School by its most accomplished alumnus in academia always were welcome treats for the faculty. His most recent visit was in 1989, when he returned to LSU for induction into the University's Alumni Hall of Distinction. His acceptance speech then told much about the man: it was a praise of those who had taught him at LSU a half century earlier.

To those who knew Hodge, none of his professional accomplishments matched the warmth and friendship which he shared with others. He was a master raconteur, his eyes twinkling as he recounted a story or anecdote. Perhaps his greatest pride of authorship was in the collection of political stories and anecdotes which he published in 1964. Colleagues recall that Hodge, "a true liberal in matters of race relations," used his precise but gentle wit to defuse faculty tension during the volatile 1950s and 1960s.

And could he dance! The bumper sticker on his automobile "I'd Rather Be Dancing" tells as much about the man as any biography. It was only fitting that at the memorial services for Hodge at Washington University shortly after his death, the music was provided by Hodge's favorite dance band.

Hodge's unexpected death at 73 earlier this year brought an end to the remarkable career of the LSU Law Center's most prestigious alumnus in legal education. But the impact of his life continues, primarily in the lives of the many who will benefit from his legal scholarship. And mostly he will be remembered warmly by those of us who were fortunate enough to watch him charm an alumnus, stimulate a colleague or excite a student. He was Wordsworth's

“creative being and sensitive soul,” one of those rare persons whose death leaves his friends sad that they had not spent more time with him.

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