

WILLIAM H. HASTIE

ROY WILKINS†

William Henry Hastie was a person of considerable personal charm and warmth. He was a scholar. He was a brilliant attorney and a highly respected judge. He was highly principled. He was a pioneer in the sense that he was the first black man to hold several important governmental posts.

During the years 1939-40, Hastie served as Dean and professor at the Howard University Law School. He left his post to accept the job of civilian aide and race relations advisor to Secretary of War Henry Stimson. Two years later, he resigned in dramatic protest against a decision by the Army to set up a segregated Air Corps Technical Training School in Missouri. His action helped earn him the coveted Spingarn Award on June 6, 1943. On behalf of the NAACP, Congressman Will Rogers, Jr., of California, made the presentation at the annual convention held in Detroit. The citation commended jurist and educator Hastie "for his distinguished career as a jurist and as an uncompromising champion of equal justice. His every act, and particularly his protest against racial bigotry in an army fighting for the democratic processes, has established a standard of character and conduct."

Bill Hastie, as he was known to his intimate friends, was a finely tuned instrument, modest to the degree that all truly great men are modest. It is not generally known that he spent his summers on the Pacific Coast where he filled in for members of the Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.

Out of this circumstance (and no one officially knows for sure except Hastie and the signatories) grew the voluntary recommendation to the President that the next vacancy on the United States Supreme Court should be filled by nominee William H. Hastie. Characteristically, Bill Hastie never said a word about this nomination. It was contained in a private letter to

† Executive Director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

the President of the United States having to do with the business of the United States. Hastie evidently thought the matter ought to lie there, privately, notwithstanding that he, Hastie, was the subject of the letter.

Bill Hastie was my friend, one whose image burns ever brightly and continually in my memory.