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## Remembering Judge Hugh R. Jones

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## REMEMBERING JUDGE HUGH R. JONES

*Douglas E. Abrams\**

*Mary Lou Crowley\*\**

When Judge Hugh R. Jones died March 3, 2001, at the age of eighty-six, New York lost an “intellectual giant” devoted to lifelong public service.<sup>1</sup> His eight law clerks lost a mentor, role model, and friend. We clerks were proud to have our careers linked with his—not only because he taught us so much, but also because his luster made us look so good. As Judge Jones approached mandatory retirement age in 1984 after twelve years on the New York Court of Appeals, the New York Times called him the “intellectual leader of the court.”<sup>2</sup> Herald Price Fahringer lauded the Judge’s “unbeatable intellectual prowess” and called him “a man of letters” who “provided . . . a new standard of intellect in the art of decision making.”<sup>3</sup> Judge Matthew J. Jasen praised his colleague’s “creative talent and unusual energy,”<sup>4</sup> and his “comprehensive knowledge of the law, . . . vigorous precision and . . . abiding fidelity to the judicial role.”<sup>5</sup> Speaking about the Court, former Chief Judge Charles D. Breitel was more direct. Judge Jones, he said, was “one of the best minds we’ve ever had.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Caher, *Judge Hugh R. Jones* (obituary), N.Y.L.J., Mar. 6, 2001, at 2.

<sup>2</sup> David Margolick, *New York’s Court of Appeals Faces Vast Changes as a New Era Begins*, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 7, 1982, at 1. See also Laura Mansnerus, *Hugh R. Jones* (obituary), N.Y. TIMES, Mar. 6, 2001, at A19 (calling Judge Jones “an intellectual leader of the state’s highest court and one of its best writers”; quoting Chief Judge Judith S. Kaye, who called Judge Jones “the court’s most facile and skillful writer”).

<sup>3</sup> Herald Price Fahringer, *Cooke, Jones: Different Styles But Responsive to Inequities*, N.Y.L.J., Jan. 2, 1985, at 1.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew J. Jasen, *Remarks at Ceremony Marking Retirement of Associate Judge Hugh R. Jones* (Dec. 19, 1984), in 63 N.Y.2d xiii, xv (1984).

<sup>5</sup> *Id.* at xiv.

<sup>6</sup> Utica Press, Dec. 29, 1984, at 1.

Judge Jones's clerks had the good fortune to tap the mind that produced this chorus of public praise. Above everything else, however, a Hugh R. Jones clerkship taught that to be a good lawyer, one must first be a good person. Whenever someone walked into the Judge's office while we clerks in the outer chambers were attending to other matters, his greeting gave no hint whether the visitor was the Chief Judge or the janitor who emptied the wastebaskets; Judge Jones gave everyone the same warm welcome. He answered every letter he received, even ones from prisoners whose convictions the Court had affirmed or left undisturbed. On the rare nights when clerks outlasted the Judge, he went home only after first making the rounds to say good night to each of us. Even his most ordinary requests were punctuated with "please" and "thank you." He treated clerks with such unfailing courtesy that we were not surprised a few years ago when Mrs. Jones said she had never heard him raise his voice in the sixty-plus years she had known him.

Judge Jones's 1984 farewell to the Court was marked by the same grace that had marked his tenure. Transcripts of retirement ceremonies, with their final opportunity for public reminiscence and outlook, are published in the *New York Reports*. True to his character, Judge Jones concluded his remarks by thanking Court personnel by name—not only the other Judges, but also the clerks, secretaries, librarian, and support staff.<sup>7</sup> Many of these people had devoted their entire adult lives to the Court's service, and now they were immortalized in the *Reports* because someone in a high position thought to pause and remember.

Judge Jones did not truly "retire," however, until well into the 1990s. The Judge passed eighty, but public service continued to beckon and he continued to answer the call. Even a partial list of his initiatives after stepping down from the bench illustrates an unstinting devotion to the law. He chaired the Commission on Judicial Nomination, which fashions the panels from which the Governor fills Court of Appeals vacancies. But that was not all. He also chaired the Fourth Department Judicial Screening Committee; the New York State Bar Association's Special Committee to Review the Code of Professional Responsibility; the Special Committee on Executive, Legislative, and Judicial Compensation; and the Governor's Advisory Commission on Liability Insurance.

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<sup>7</sup> *Jasen, supra* note 3, at xvi-xviii.

Judge Jones's record would inspire any law clerk seeking a career compass, because he lived a noble life dedicated to advancing the greater good—as a Lieutenant Commander in the U.S. Navy during World War II, as president of the Family Services Association of America, as chairman of the New York State Board of Social Welfare, as Hamilton College Life Trustee, as trustee of the State University of New York, as president of both the Oneida County Bar Association and the New York State Bar Association, and as Chancellor to three Presiding Bishops of the Episcopal Church.

We clerks are blessed because, for the rest of our careers, the credential "Law Clerk to Hugh R. Jones" will command the abiding respect of anyone who ever met our mentor. We are blessed because years ago, we were daily beneficiaries of insights distilled from more than a half-century of accomplishment in law, public service, and jurisprudence. We are blessed too because the Judge remained generous with these insights long after our terms in his chambers ended.

Judge Jones's most enduring lessons, however, were unrelated to doctrine. He taught us how to perceive law and its place in human experience. He taught us how to think and reason. Most important, he taught us how to live.

