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BY

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Prepared for Delivery

Before

THE SUPREME COURT

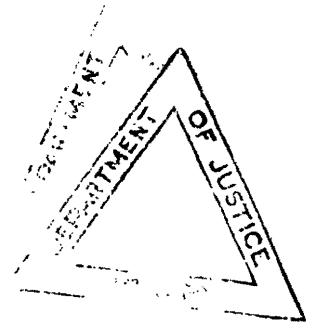
AT THE MEMORIAL SERVICES

In Honor of

THE LATE JUSTICE FRED M. VINSON

October 25, 1954

12:00 N.



Eminent members of the legal profession have today paid just tribute to the memory of the late Chief Justice Vinson. The strength of his character, his friendliness and humility, and his devotion to the public service as legislator, as Circuit Judge, as administrator and Cabinet officer, and finally as Chief Justice of the United States are indelibly impressed on our hearts and minds.

The Nation first knew him for his fourteen years of service in Congress. His warm personality, his folksy way of weaving homespun philosophy, his capacity for making friends and above all his integrity, combined to win over his adversaries in Congress to many social and economic reforms which he supported.

In 1937 he was offered a judgeship on the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia. Reluctantly he decided to abandon his legislative career to assume judicial duties. In his later years he often reminisced, with obvious relish, about his Congressional career.

In his new judicial post, he served with distinction. His colleagues on the Court of Appeals, Judges Groner, Stephens, Rutledge, and others, were his good friends and held him in highest regard and affection.

He was a stickler for the facts and studied each record with great care. Lacking pretense and despising sham, he would not hesitate to pierce the armor of any attorney who dared advance an untenable argument or one not based on the record. Yet, he was also so considerate, gentle and courteous, that the inexperienced and uninitiated lawyer was promptly set at ease in his presence. Off the bench, in meeting a young attorney, the "Chief" did not permit the occasion to pass without offering a kind word of encouragement.

If one quality stood out in him above others, it was his complete devotion to duty. When the country called upon him to render service to it he responded without the slightest hesitation or thought of personal sacrifice. The circumstances surrounding his resignation from the Court of Appeals testify to the high sense of duty which actuated him.

One day while he was a member of the Court of Appeals and talking to a brother judge in his office, the phone rang. It was the President. -- Would he resign to accept the wartime job of Economic Stabilizer? The immediate answer was "Yes, Sir, if you think I can be of help." There was no indecision, no thought about personal considerations; there were no expressed regrets about assuming one of the most controversial positions in Government.

As Director of Economic Stabilization from 1943 to 1945, he was called upon to administer a most difficult assignment. It was his job to direct and implement a policy of holding the line against increases in ceilings on prices and wages. That he was successful in achieving this aim during a highly inflationary war period is a tribute to his tact and courage in the face of great pressures from every source.

In 1945 he was appointed Federal Loan Administrator. Shortly thereafter he was appointed Director of War Mobilization and Reconversion, and in the same year was made Secretary of the Treasury. This was his last executive post. In 1946 President Truman appointed him as the thirteenth Chief Justice of the United States. It was this great office which crowned his life work as a public servant. He held it until his untimely death in 1953.

The "Chief" cannot, among his friends and associates here today, be remembered merely in terms of the opinions rendered by him while on the Supreme Court. He was full of worldly wisdom, dignity and humility.

The "Chief" brought to his high office a very rare quality -- a keen and sympathetic understanding of people and their proper place in an orderly society. He came with a great breadth of legislative and executive experience. In the give and take of political life, he had learned to appraise men for what they were. He brought to the Court and to the conference table the practical viewpoint of the country lawyer. This seventh sense served him well in judging the conflicts that frequently arise in the course of human affairs and in the clash between the rights of the individual and those of government. His moderating influence was a decisive factor in mellowing deliberations and maintaining the prestige of the Court.

His opinions were marked by clarity and comprehension. He hated abstractions. As Judge Learned Hand once said of Mr. Justice Cardozo, so, too, Fred Vinson "never disguised the difficulties, as lazy judges do who win the game by sweeping all the chessmen off the table \*\*\*". You might disagree with him but there was no mistaking where he stood.

The "Chief" was a person of deep conviction and sturdy independence. Yet he realized only too well that there is no conclusive solution for many of the problems presented in the law. This knowledge and tolerance gave him the capacity of differing with his associates without rancor or ill-will.

AS he revered the high traditions of the law and our system of justice, so he abhorred the slightest transgression in the courts of the legal rights of even the worst offenders. Though concerned about maintaining a secure and orderly government, the "Chief" was zealous in the protection of the individual citizen from arbitrary or capricious action by Government officials. He condemned bail set at amounts the accused could not raise, even though the defendants were Communists whom he loathed. To him the equal protection of the laws was not merely an empty slogan. His decisions in the racial restrictive covenant cases and in the cases involving racial discrimination in higher education were a major contribution to the thinking and conclusion of the Court in its recent decision declaring segregation in the public schools to be unconstitutional.

He spoke for the Court in upholding the validity of the Smith Act by which Communist leaders could be imprisoned for conspiring to overthrow the government by force and violence. He joined in sustaining contempt convictions of Communist lawyers who by conduct unbecoming their high profession tried to bring our courts into disrepute. And he struck out against irresponsible union action in the mine fields which would have paralyzed our country in a period of a war emergency. He was not only a distinguished legislator, an able executive and a noted jurist but he was in every way an exemplary citizen, completely devoted to his gracious wife and two fine sons.

It was the country's good fortune that brought a man of such character, attainment, and integrity into public office. It was the country's great loss when he was taken from it.

May it please this Honorable Court: In the name of the lawyers of this nation, and particularly of the Bar of this Court, I respectfully request that the resolution presented to you in memory of the late Chief Justice Fred M. Vinson be accepted by you, and that it, together with the chronicle of these proceedings, be ordered kept for all time in the records of this Court.