

A Tribute to Merrill Hartman

Remarks by Will Pryor Upon Presentation of the Judge Learned Hand Award
by the American Jewish Committee

October 18, 2000

Adolphus Hotel, Dallas, Texas

A few months after Merrill and I started the South Dallas Legal Clinic, an article by Paul Coggins, now our United States Attorney, was published in the Dallas Morning News Sunday Magazine. It was a nice article, with color pictures and everything. Merrill, a few minutes ago I overheard Paul at our table claiming credit for the success of our clinic!

I know that all of you here are fans of the The Backstreet Boys. Well, maybe some of you. In any event, The Backstreet Boys had a hit song a couple of years ago that went like this:

I don't care who you are
Where you're from
What you did
So long as you love me.

Because I have two young daughters, I had the opportunity recently to listen to those lyrics for, perhaps, the 500th time . . . and I thought of Merrill Hartman. I'll tell you why in a moment.

How appropriate that the American Jewish Committee, a voice in our society for almost a century for inclusion, compassion, and tolerance, should recognize with this Award, a remarkable judge who is unafraid of living out his faith in God by living out, every day, his faith in justice and righteousness.

Merrill believes that God loves us all just the same, and that we should love one another. He lives out his faith by treating all who enter his courtroom with mercy, and grace . . . with a kind word . . . with a sense of humor and a gift for discernment.

With this award you recognize Merrill's contributions to the judiciary and to our civil justice system, but of course it is not *just* because Merrill is as fine a judge as we have known that he receives the Learned Hand *Human Relations* Award. It is because in our community, in our time, Merrill has inspired thousands of lawyers and judges and others to share their lives with the poor, the disadvantaged, and those most in need.

The American Jewish Committee has advanced the notion for almost a century that until all of us are free, none of us are free, Likewise, Merrill has advanced the notion that until the poor have access to lawyers, they are denied access to justice. Merrill was prompted, nearly 20 years ago, not to write articles, or make speeches or form committees--but to serve the poor, directly, immediately, and in the midst of their need.

Like the Prophet Isaiah, Merrill's response to the call was, "Here I am, Lord. Send me." Merrill has been obedient to this call, in one fashion or another, on a daily basis, for almost 20 years.

Merrill's message to everyone who comes before him, to his community of friends as well as strangers, *and to each of you in this room*, is simple. The message is:

I don't care who you are
Where you're from
What you did
I love you, because God loves you.

I know that I am not the recipient of your Award! But I consider it to be an *even greater* honor to be his friend, and just to have been asked to be with you today. Congratulations, Merrill, and congratulations to the American Jewish Committee.