



1984

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Recommended Citation

Norman Dorsen, *Ralph Brown - Civil Libertarian*, 93 *Yale L.J.* (1984).
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/ylj/vol93/iss7/1>

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The Yale Law Journal

Volume 93, Number 7, June 1984

Ralph Brown—Civil Libertarian

Norman Dorsen†

Ralph Brown has retired from the Yale law faculty, but he has not, thank goodness, retired from the board of directors of the ACLU or from his lifetime work in support of civil liberties.

More than three decades ago, Ralph helped organize, and was the first chairman of, the Connecticut Civil Liberties Union. It was one of a small but growing number of state affiliates of the national organization. Ralph's leadership in those early days helped ensure the development of an effective advocate of individual rights in Connecticut.

It is at the national level, though, that Ralph has most flourished. He came to the ACLU board in 1955, and is now its second most senior member. He has been a vice-president; he has sat on the executive committee; he has served on important special committees. Currently he chairs the Union's Constitution Committee and is a member of its Free Speech/Association Committee.

Ralph's contributions extend far beyond these activities. I particularly appreciate his terseness in board debate; to my knowledge, he has never had to be cautioned to adhere to our three-minute limit on speeches. More important, when voices are rising, and ideas seem hopelessly entangled, he is often the one who, with a few deft strokes, cuts through the knots. His cool head and his practical mind make him a most valuable colleague, equally respected by those who share his views and those who don't.

His art is matched by his humor. I still recall the day a candidate for a board office was interminably recounting his numerous organizational affiliations and activities. With seeming innocence, Ralph broke in, "Have

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you really memorized your entire resumé?" The candidacy was destroyed amidst waves of laughter.

Ralph has also been a model for our younger colleagues, both directly, in his personal kindness, and indirectly, because he refuses to take himself or his views too seriously, however serious the matter under discussion.

Ralph's dedication to the ACLU apparently knows no bounds. He has often made several round trips in a single weekend between New York and New Haven or Guilford in order to participate in board meetings while keeping his engagements back home. When one understands that ACLU meetings are not always models of Athenian debate, and that the New Haven Railroad is not always a model form of conveyance, one grasps the full extent of Ralph's commitment.

Ralph's major scholarly contribution to civil liberties is his prize-winning book, *Loyalty and Security*.¹ Written in the 1950's, it is one of the two or three most influential efforts in the cause to reclaim an open society that had been overtaken by paranoia and philistinism. Ralph has not lost his edge; recalling the bitter days, he recently wrote: "So far, we have been spared the wholesale persecutions of individuals that blackened the McCarthy era; but the assault on principle is massive. The Bill of Rights, civil rights, and women's rights, like ERA and abortion, are under fire in more ways than ever before in my memory."²

Ralph's special qualities were recognized by Roger Baldwin, the principal organizer and inspiring leader of the ACLU for many years. As an example of Roger's high regard for Ralph, I recall a dinner Roger gave in 1968 or 1969 after Ernest Angell, our president, had announced he would step down: Ralph was one of a small number of board members that Roger brought together to review the Union's general position and plan for the coming period.

Just as Roger Baldwin's generation valued Ralph's insight and judgment, so do we today. It is a privilege to praise a good man by spreading his good works on the record, on the occasion of his retirement from active teaching at the Yale Law School.

1. R. BROWN, *LOYALTY AND SECURITY: EMPLOYMENT TESTS IN THE UNITED STATES* (1958).
2. Statement to ACLU Board of Directors, June 1982.