

## Raymond M. Brown Featured in *New Jersey Law Journal* Bar Report on Being Named Recipient of New Jersey State Bar Foundation's 2022 Medal of Honor

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Raymond M. Brown

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Raymond M. Brown, partner at Pashman Stein Walder Hayden, was featured in the *New Jersey Law Journal* Bar Report on being named the recipient, together with Justice Jaynee LaVecchia (Ret.), of the New Jersey State Bar Foundation's 2022 Medal of Honor, the Foundation's most prestigious award. Raymond Brown and Justice LaVecchia will receive the award on September 20, 2022, at the Park Chateau in East Brunswick. To register for the event, please click here. The Bar Report included the following Q & A with Brown:

***You've enjoyed a long and illustrious career as criminal defense and civil rights attorney. How and when did you develop an interest in the law?***

*As a young person, people would always ask, "Are you going to be a lawyer like your father?" And my instinct was to say, "No, of course not." It wasn't until I was in college at Columbia University where I was a leader of the Black student movement and involved with demonstrations that my attitude began to change. We wound up getting arrested and I was charged with some serious crimes, which I've had to explain to every bar committee ever since. I think that was when I began to see the law as a tool of social engineering and economic independence.*

***Your father, Raymond A. Brown, is regarded as the first prominent Black trial attorney in New Jersey, who took many high-profile cases in his career. What was it like growing up as his son?***

*My father was a giant as a human being, forget being a lawyer. He was very prominent nationally in human and civil rights. And on top of that, a premier lawyer. So I don't know how you could grow up and*

*not be profoundly affected by that. He was very prescient in that he tried to create the space for me to be myself, because we are different in persona and personality, but you couldn't help but be affected by it. As for the practice of law, he was a tremendous role model in terms of basic habits. His work habits, his commitment to preparation, the sense of how he related to people, are all secrets of the craft. I've known children of prominent people, including lawyers, who were crushed by the weight of it. I think my father did his best to allow me to find my own footing and establish something of a persona. I still don't think I'm the lawyer he was, but I haven't met anyone who is. He was the kind of person who could walk into a room of a thousand people and you could feel his presence. Not from the loudness of his voice but from the strength of his persona. He was a remarkable person.*

*He believed we should do a third of our work pro bono, which is not a very viable economic model. We tend to think of him in terms of cases like Hurricane Carter and Dr. X, but his view was that it isn't causes célèbres that matter, it's the ugly, the unwashed, the unpopular, the ungrateful clients, the people at the bottom, who need representation.*

*Though he was one of the strongest human beings I ever met, he believed in grace. On the surface it was a contrast. You can learn those traits and try to emulate them. He was fearless. I'm not fearless but I've learned to not let it affect me.*

*He has profoundly affected my persona, my commitment to larger causes and my abilities as a lawyer.*

*Certainly, the sheer number of Black lawyers has increased. There were very small numbers when I started. The environment has changed as well. My first murder trial was in Somerville in 1975, where the defendants had shot someone while robbing the Bound Brook Hotel. I went down there for the trial, and during the six weeks I was in Somerville, not a person in the town spoke to me. It was an interesting challenge workwise. New Jersey was still a de facto segregated state in those times.*

*I would say by the time I had been practicing 10 years, some of the premier lawyers in the state on the criminal side were Black lawyers—guys like my dad, Tom Ashley, Ted Wells, Alan Bowman, Peter Harvey and others. If I weren't so modest I'd include myself in that group. So there was a gradual transition, where it became more common to see Black lawyers, especially in the urban communities. Still, the problem was that most of the Black lawyers were on the criminal side. It was another five or 10 years before Black lawyers started to do work at the state or other levels.*

***In a career that has spanned nearly five decades, what are the most important cases you've handled?***

*It's difficult because every case is its own microcosm. Certainly cases like the trial of Senator Menendez, or the trial of Labor Secretary Donovan. Those are high-profile cases where the exposure, the need to balance press, the presence of the federal government all add to the complexity of the case and force you to elevate your game. On the other hand, I grew up representing number runners, people charged with burglaries and murders and armed robberies, cases like the Somerville robbery. To me that was a big case.*

*I'm also proud of the work we've done internationally. We've been involved in cases in Sierra Leone and Darfur, where you're talking about crimes against humanity and genocide, involving thousands, if not millions of people. There, the question from a craft point of view was how to manage evidence that comes from an area of armed conflict over the course of weeks, months, years and hundreds of square kilometers and multiple languages and dialects. How do you organize the evidence and put that together? So, some of the international work we've done has had a profound impact on how we think about evidence and how we manage complex litigation.*

*It's hard to put a finger on a favorite case. Recently I appeared before the New Jersey Supreme Court in a number of important cases, representing amici, *State v. Andujar*, *Acoli v. New Jersey State Parole Board* and *State v. Nyema*, that were professionally satisfying and will perhaps have ramifications for the law in our state. However, to each individual accused, or to each client you represent, that case is the most important.*

***In your estimation, what makes a good attorney?***

*I'd say the first thing is commitment to the client's cause. There are attorneys who go through the motions. You can't win by virtue of commitment alone, but if you're not committed, I don't think you can represent clients effectively.*

*The second is commitment to mastering craft. A lawyer's commitment to improvement and to continued growth, a lawyer's understanding of the human condition, those are important in every trial.*

*The wonderful thing about trial work is that if you maintain your health, you're not working with your back, you're working with your mind. After 50 years I feel like I'm just learning the craft. There are things I learn every day. How you manage strategy, tactics, how you approach witnesses, those are things you can continue to improve upon. As you become more mature, your people skills and your intuitive sense improves, and your ability to handle stress improves. In those ways it's a remarkable craft in which to engage. It also lets you be involved in the most intimate aspects of the people you represent. We have to penetrate into the deepest, sometimes darkest secrets people have, and find a way to find redemption or some other positive aspect.*

**What's the best piece of advice you've ever received?**

*My father's ability to cross examine was phenomenal. The best cross examiner I ever saw. When I finally pressed him for the most important piece of advice, he said, "listen." Every lawyer who's read a transcript has seen a missed chance to exploit an answer, often because they have a lot going through their head at the time. The notion of having a mind that is at rest in the middle of chaos, and your ability to exploit that rest to advance your client's cause, is critical. We have several systems for developing strategic judgment, but at the heart of it is the ability to listen—to understand your client and what's happening as a trial unfolds.*

**How would you describe yourself as an attorney and your approach to the law?**

*As a trial lawyer, I like to think that I am committed to my client's cause. Within the limits of the rules of professional conduct, I will do what it takes to prevail for my client. I think I am also truthful with my clients. Sometimes you have to find ways of telling clients things they don't want to hear, but you can't have strategic judgment unless you have developed a rapport. The ability to evaluate, free of ego, the opposition—what are their strengths, weaknesses, and how do you exploit them—is important. I think my strategic sense and people skills are quite good, but I'm continuing to work on every other aspect of the craft.*

*I've been practicing for almost 50 years. There are still things I'm learning. Because when you first start out, in a trial you're sort of lurching from witness to witness, doing the best you can. But being able to put each witness in context, having some sense of where you are going with a witness, fitting everything into the larger whole, those are things you can learn at any time in your career. In sports they call it the game slowing down. That's something that only comes with time. Time and humility, which I like to think I have.*

*We tend to think of the law as an intellectual engagement, because it brings ideas to the resolution of the most pressing problems that human beings have. But it's more than ideas—it involves spirit and a feel for people. I think what set my father apart was his ability to combine intellectual freshness and openness to new ideas with a deep understanding of human beings and the human condition, and learning to set aside your own biases.*

**Many know you as an attorney, but what are your interests outside of the court?**

*I've been practicing yoga for 30 years, which makes me a beginner. Ultimately, the purpose of yoga is to control the fluctuations of the mind, to find a place of peace and an ability to be open to the universe. It's a great conditioner and healing art.*

*I've also been doing calligraphy for 20 years, so I'm also a beginner there. I haven't made a living out of it, but I find it very peaceful and enjoyable. I'd hate to describe my grandson as a hobby, but I have two wonderful children, a grandson and a wonderful family. No lawyer as ever sat on their deathbed and wished they'd spent more time in the*

*law library. That ability to spend time with family is important. I have a wife who's a wonderful lawyer. She challenges me. I think the ability to be immersed in an environment where people are respectful but are constantly challenging you is important. You tend to lose your edge when you're in an environment where everyone tells you you're the greatest thing since sliced bread.*

**What does receiving the NJSBF's Medal of Honor mean to you?**

*It is overwhelming to be considered with Justice LaVecchia, who is one of the giants of the legal community and our community at large in New Jersey. They say justice is our secular faith and we are all its servants. It's the relationship of craft to higher purpose. I'm happy to be recognized for that.*

To read the full article click [here](#)