



2008

## Tribute to Honorable George Howard, Jr.

Honorable Leon Holmes

Follow this and additional works at: <https://lawrepository.ualr.edu/lawreview>



Part of the [Judges Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Honorable Leon Holmes, *Tribute to Honorable George Howard, Jr.*, 30 U. ARK. LITTLE ROCK L. REV. 243 (2008).

Available at: <https://lawrepository.ualr.edu/lawreview/vol30/iss2/4>

This Essay is brought to you for free and open access by Bowen Law Repository: Scholarship & Archives. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Arkansas at Little Rock Law Review by an authorized editor of Bowen Law Repository: Scholarship & Archives. For more information, please contact [mmserfass@ualr.edu](mailto:mmserfass@ualr.edu).

---

## Tribute to Honorable George Howard, Jr.

### Cover Page Footnote

The Honorable George Howard, Jr., passed away on April 21, 2007, at the age of eighty-two. He was a man of many firsts, and the University of Arkansas at Little Rock Bowen School of Law is proud to have an endowed professorship in his name and honor. What follows is one of the essays from a collection of tributes to the late Judge Howard, written by some of his strongest friends, colleagues, and admirers. Given the impact of Judge Howard's civil rights work in the state of Arkansas, it is altogether fitting that this tribute to his legacy is included in this Law Review issue that also commemorates the 50th Anniversary of the integration of Central High School as well as other continuing legal efforts in civil rights.

## TRIBUTE TO HONORABLE GEORGE HOWARD, JR.

### *Honorable Leon Holmes\**

When I became Chief Judge, I went to each of the judges and asked for advice as to how I should proceed. Judge Howard told me two things. First, he said I should pray. He said that whenever he faced a difficult decision as a judge, he would get on his knees in a private place and pray. Second, he said that I should read the 23rd Psalm and the 91st Psalm every day, as his mother had advised him to do when he was a young man, and as he had done for some sixty years. Judge Howard reached behind his desk, pulled out his Bible, and read the 91st Psalm in that deliberate, emphatic cadence with which all who knew him are familiar. Over the better part of an hour, Judge Howard explained to me how God had used the 91st Psalm to surround him with protection; and he explained how the 91st Psalm applied to me as I took on the responsibility of Chief Judge.

George Howard was a very private man. During that hour or so that we spent together, he pulled the curtain aside and gave me a glimpse of his rich interior life.

Over the last two years of his life, Judge Howard repeatedly pushed himself to drive from Pine Bluff to Little Rock so that he could do justice even when he was so weak and so frail that he could not rise from a chair or open a door by himself. We who watched him were amazed that he could push a body so weak and so frail to continue to pursue justice. It was as though the Lord had challenged him each day, "George, my servant, can you get up, as weak as you are, drive to Little Rock, take the bench, and pursue justice today?" And each day, Judge Howard responded, "I can." He was still saying, "I can," and trying to get up, when the Lord said, "Enough," and took him home.

George Howard was a man of unsurpassed determination. During the last two years of his life, he displayed in a visible way the determination that had enabled him to overcome momentous obstacles during the course of his life.

Throughout his life, Judge Howard pursued justice and did so often in the face of tremendous adversity. Because racism was prevalent during his years as a lawyer, he was not infrequently treated with disrespect, even by judges before whom he appeared; but he was always courteous, even when others were not. As a part of his law practice, he represented clients in dese-

---

\* Leon Holmes is the Chief Judge of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Arkansas.

gregating the Arkansas schools, for which he was hated and vilified. He was made the target of numerous death threats. Yet, he did not back down, nor did he return evil for evil. He never showed fear. He never became bitter. He continued to love his country, to which he often referred as "this great nation." He always did what was right; and he did it in the right way. He always pursued justice; and he pursued it without malice.

George Howard was a man of great courage and great charity. He pursued justice when a lesser man would have succumbed to fear; and he continued to love when a lesser man would have succumbed to hate.

Where did the strength come from? In that hour or so that Judge Howard spent reading the 91st Psalm aloud and explaining how that Psalm had affected his life, I learned where the strength came from. George Howard drew strength from the fact that he lived under the shadow of the Almighty. He drew strength from the fact that he made the Lord his refuge and his fortress. He drew strength from the fact that he trusted in God. He drew strength from his expectation that God would deliver him from danger, so he was not afraid. He set his love upon God; and he believed that God would deliver him.

George Howard, Jr., will be remembered for his pioneering work as a civil rights lawyer. He will be remembered as an advocate who could not be intimidated and who would not hate. He will be remembered as a judge who insisted on dignity in the courtroom and impartiality in the justice that he dispensed. He will be remembered as a devoted husband and a loving father. In all of that, he will be remembered as a man of unsurpassed determination.

Judge Howard would want us also to remember the source of his strength, the rock on which he stood. We would fall short of the man were we to remember him as a pioneer in the cause of racial equality, a courageous advocate for the oppressed, a patriot who loved his country, a judge who presided with dignity and impartiality, a devoted husband and father, and a man of unsurpassed determination—unless we also remember that he was all of those things because he was, first of all, a man of God.