

2016 ADL CIVIL RIGHTS AWARDS RECEPTION
Scott L. Levin, Regional Director
February 24, 2016

Civil rights is not a zero sum game. Everyone does not have to be a "winner" or a "loser."

In this highly charged election season, it is hard to remember that ensuring the civil rights of others does not mean it comes at the cost of losing your own rights. I do not know about any of you, but last year's Supreme Court decision allowing two people of the same sex to marry, has not affected my 35-year heterosexual marriage one whit.

Marriage equality is not a zero sum game.

Ensuring women have control over their own decisions and bodies for more than 40 years since *Roe v. Wade* has not taken away any of my personal rights. Even if I opposed abortion, the fact that others have chosen to make that difficult decision does not take away any of my rights.

Choice is not a zero sum game.

Working to lower the disproportionately high rates of incarceration and disparate treatment of African Americans by law enforcement does not jeopardize any of my rights. The fact that I support the philosophy behind Black Lives Matter, does not mean I think that the lives of those that are not Black do not matter. It simply means that attention must be given to those that society has undervalued for too long.

Fighting discrimination, bias and privilege is not a zero sum game.

And, finally, recognizing that not everyone in our country has the same opportunities to obtain a meaningful education does not mean my children's education will suffer if I advocate to better train teachers in under-served schools and to take immediate steps to stop the school-to-prison pipeline.

Education equity is not a zero sum game.

Tonight, we are privileged to honor true heroes in the struggle to obtain equity in education. I thought it important to tell you that for over 60 years ADL has been involved in the effort to end bias, discrimination and unequal opportunities in education. ADL filed its first friend of the court brief in *Brown vs. Board of Education*, having acted on its mandate "to secure justice and fair treatment to all citizens alike and to put an end forever to unjust and unfair discrimination." ADL urged the Court to "disavow the 'separate but equal' doctrine and argued that "that which is unequal in fact cannot be equal in law."

Now, 62 years after the Supreme Court struck down segregation in Topeka, we find that education equity remains an important civil rights issue. Schools across this country are still

challenged to deal in meaningful ways with our increasingly diverse society. One need only consider:

- School re-segregation has resurfaced in a major way; in 1972, almost 20 years following Brown, 25% of black students in the South still attended highly segregated schools; today, 44 more years later, more than twice that amount of Black and Latino students are in segregated schools
- 2014 was the first school year when more children of color were enrolled in U.S. public schools than White children; however, the diversity of our teaching force is stubbornly stagnant at 80% White
- Of all the teachers in the U.S., only 2% are Black and male
- The racial disproportionality in school discipline practices, where Black students are suspended at more than three times the rate of White children, has led to a "School to Prison Pipeline"

Clearly, challenges still exist.

I am so pleased that we are able to honor Carlotta Walls LaNier and Noel and Leslie Ginsburg, who have all worked for so long to bring equity to education. Ms. LaNier, I have for so long admired the courage you showed as a 14-year old girl when you entered the doors of Central High School in Little Rock. I know that even with a phalanx of National Guard troops surrounding you, it must have provided very little comfort to the verbal and physical abuse you withstood. Still, to the rest of the nation, your bravery provided a model that led to so many others being able to pursue a just and fair education, and to insist that the government see to it that their civil rights were protected. The fact that you have carried on with this mission for so long is a testament to your strength and leadership.

Noel and Leslie, we have known each other nearly our entire lives. I am so proud of the work you have done to ensure that students that would otherwise have had little chance to graduate high school, let alone pursue a college education, could do so. You are a true reflection of ADL's mission, as you have worked so hard to not only support the Jewish community but also to seek justice and fair treatment to all.

Thank you all for being here to honor Carlotta, Noel and Leslie. And thank you for helping to ensure civil rights is not a zero sum game.