



American Bar Association  
**News Release**

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**U.S. District Court Judge Matthew J. Perry Jr. to Receive ABA Liberty Achievement Award**

CHICAGO, Sept. 30, 2008 — The American Bar Association Tort Trial & Insurance Practice Section will present its Liberty Achievement Award to Matthew J. Perry Jr., the first African-American judge on the U.S. District Court for South Carolina, on Thursday, Oct. 2, at the Joint Welcome and Diversity in the Profession Reception, Westin Resort Hilton Head Island, Ocean Front Pavilion, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. This event is part of the section's fall meeting.

The Liberty Achievement Award raises awareness about the importance of diversifying the legal profession by honoring lawyers and judges who actively promote diversity within the legal community. The award was inaugurated at the ABA's Annual Meeting in New York City in August.

"It is truly fitting that Matthew Perry, who has played such a pivotal role in the integration of institutions and facilities in the state of South Carolina, is among the first recipients of this very special award. Judge Perry is one of the true heroes in South Carolina. Throughout his legal career, he has fought hard and well for integration and diversity. As the first African-American judge on the district court, Matthew has demonstrated his commitment to diversity and his successful efforts have opened doors to opportunity for so many. He has made the dream of law school a reality for many, and proven that with perseverance you can accomplish great things and make a difference," said Section Chair Timothy W. Bouch of Charleston, S.C.

A native of Columbia, S.C., Perry received his bachelor's degree in 1948 and his law degree in 1951 from South Carolina State College (now university) following service in the U.S. Army during World War II. He began his legal career in 1956 in Spartanburg, S.C. where he was the first African-American to open a law office in the state, taking on significant civil rights cases, including *Flemming v. South Carolina Electric and Gas Co.*

Appointed to the U.S. District Court for the District of South Carolina by President Carter in 1979, Perry was the first African-American to serve on the court. He assumed senior status in 1995. Prior to serving on the district court, Perry was appointed by President Ford as a judge on the United States Court of Military Appeals in Washington, D.C., where he was the first African-American from the deep south appointed to the federal bench.

Notably, Perry led the successful court case to integrate Clemson University in 1963 by fighting for the admission of Harvey B. Gantt, who later became mayor of Charlotte, N.C. Also, he led the successful effort to determine a major reapportionment case in 1972. The U.S. Courthouse in Columbia is named for Judge Perry.

Perry has been awarded numerous honorary degrees including Doctor of Laws degrees from South Carolina State College, the University of South Carolina and Voorhees College; and Doctor of Humanities degrees from Francis Marion College and Lander College. Judge Perry has been recognized with The Order of the Palmetto by South Carolina Governor Richard W. Riley; the Distinguished Alumnus Award-South Carolina State University; the South Carolinian of the Year Award in 1977; the William R. Ming Advocacy Award; and the Distinguished Native Son Award-South Carolina Conference of Branches, NAACP. He received the ABA Section of Individual Rights and Responsibilities Thurgood Marshall Award in 2007.

Other recipients of this special award are U.S. District Court Judge Bernice B Donald, Memphis, Tenn., and Catherine Christian of New York City. Donald, long active in the ABA, serves as its first African-American secretary. Christian is an assistant district attorney in the New York County District Attorney's Office and was the first African-American president of the New York County Lawyers' Association.

The ABA Tort Trial & Insurance Practice Section unites plaintiff, defense, insurance and corporate counsel to advance the civil justice system. TIPS is a national source of expertise in tort, trial and insurance practice and brings lawyers together to share information and speak out on issues of importance. The section, with nearly 35,000 members, has 34 general committees that focus on substantive and procedural matters in areas across the broad spectrum of civil law and practice. For more information about the Tort Trial & Insurance Practice Section visit the TIPS Web site, [www.abanet.org/tips](http://www.abanet.org/tips).

With more than 407,000 members, the American Bar Association is the largest voluntary professional membership organization in the world. As the national voice of the legal profession, the ABA works to improve the administration of justice, promotes programs that assist lawyers and judges in their work, accredits law schools, provides continuing legal education, and works to build public understanding around the world of the importance of the rule of law.

***Editors Note:*** Reporters are invited to attend the presentation ceremony at the TIPS Fall Meeting and can obtain ABA press credentials from with Debbie Weixl of ABA Media Relations at 312/988-6126 or e-mail [weixld@staff.abanet.org](mailto:weixld@staff.abanet.org). On site call 847/902-9019.